

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**The Jesuit Educational
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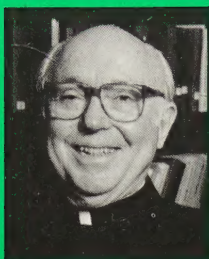
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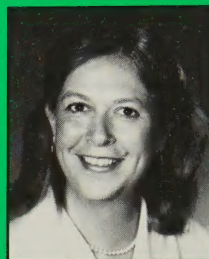
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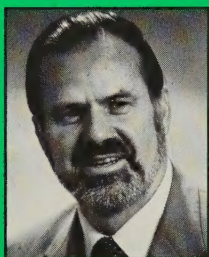
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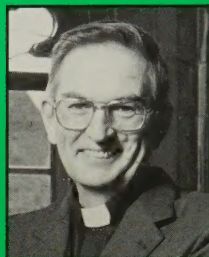
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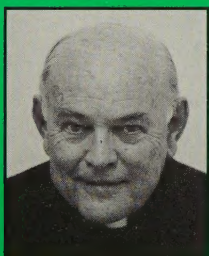
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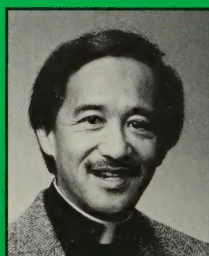
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The quarterly journal HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development (JECHD), Saint John's Seminary, 127 Lake St., Brighton, MA 02135-3898. The JECHD is a nonprofit organization established to be of service to persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care, and education. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$20.00; all other countries, \$27.00. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$7.00; all other countries, \$8.00. Second-class postage paid in Boston, MA, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send 3579 to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 1994 by HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Saint John's Seminary, 127 Lake St., Brighton, MA 02135-3898. Phone: (617) 562-0766. Fax: (617) 562-0668.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Illustrations, if any, should be submitted as high-quality, glossy, unmounted black and white photographic prints. Do not send original artwork.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., Jesuit Community, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

SEXUALITY INSTITUTE OPENING IN BOSTON

Last year we announced in the pages of this publication the plan of the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development to establish a year-round academic program for formation personnel and spiritual directors working in seminaries and religious congregations. We described the project as an effort to help these men and women upgrade their knowledge and counseling skills related to the issue of sexuality. Given a title that indicates the program's principal aim—the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality—this new Jesuit venture is conceived as a positive and creative aid to those who prepare the young men and women entering seminaries and novitiates to live maturely and with integrity a life of celibacy in service of the church.

Originally, we intended to situate the program in Denver, Colorado; many of the administrators, faculty, and trustees at Regis University warmly invited us to move there. But because we were disappointed in our attempts to find funding that would enable us to establish the institute in Denver, we had to consider alternative locations. Having now found a new home in the Boston area, we consider the change both fortunate and providential.

Several benefactors and foundations made generous offers of financial help on the condition that we anchor the project in or near Boston. At the same time, Cardinal Bernard F. Law and the administrators at Saint John's Seminary invited us to take over some ideal office space and residential rooms on their attractive campus in Brighton, Massachusetts

(just across the street from Jesuit-run Boston College). This appears to be a close-to-perfect setting for what we hope to accomplish. So now the offices of the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development and the staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT are located in a city and on a campus that will be both convenient and enjoyable for those who come to study at our institute. It wasn't easy for us to give up thoughts of Denver and the Rocky Mountains, but when it comes to culture, history, and countless other metropolitan treasures, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any other American city to match Boston.

The institute will provide instruction—principally in tutorial form—regarding human anatomy, physiology, psychology, psychopathology, morality, and spirituality related to sexuality. Additionally, the skills needed to communicate effectively with the young about their sexual uncertainties, problems, and development will be taught in a practical manner, especially through role playing. The program is an academic one; even though the staff will include several thoroughly trained and experienced psychiatrists and psychologists, no clinical or therapeutic services will be provided.

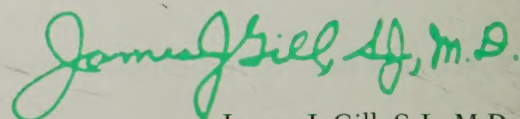
The program will be open to laypersons, along with clergy and religious women and men. At the start, we will enroll only people intending to work as, or already engaged as, formation personnel or spiritual directors in seminaries or houses of religious formation. Later, when the institute has been firmly established and is expanding, we expect that participants in the program will include bishops, religious superiors, other religious leaders, persons involved in ministry to the young, people studying to be spiritual directors, and ministers of other Christian denominations.

Under the guidance of professionals knowledgeable and experienced in fostering personal growth toward Christian psychosexual maturity, the students in the institute will focus virtually all of their study time on a single issue: sexuality. It is expected that the average stay of our students will be a month or two. The duration will be individualized, as determined by each student. We will do all we can to make the costs of room, board, and tuition affordable.

In launching this exciting new project, we are keeping in mind Pope John Paul II's challenging statement in his encyclical *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: "Since the charism of celibacy, even when it is genuine and has proved itself, leaves man's affections and instinctive impulses intact, candidates to the priesthood need an affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce anything that is a threat to it, vigilant over both body and spirit, and capable of esteem and respect in interpersonal relationships between men and women." He could have written the same words about candidates for a vowed life of celibacy in religious congregations. Our aim is to be

of help to those guiding future priests and religious toward this lofty Christian ideal.

In the next issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, we will give more complete details regarding our institute, which we plan to put into operation during the fall season. In the meantime, we want you, our readers, to know how grateful we are for your encouragement, prayers, financial help, and suggestions regarding sources of funding. We still need your support in order to accomplish our goals. All the recent problems of the clergy and religious related to sexuality and broadcast to the world by the media have convinced us that this program is urgently needed by the church. And judging from the way our plans are materializing, it appears to us that God wants the project to succeed. We hope and pray that's true.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

Announcing
the opening in the fall of 1994
of
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a new program offered by
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at Saint John's Archdiocesan Seminary
in Greater Boston, Massachusetts

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Forgive But Don't Forget

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

Forgive and forget." Many of us learned that maxim both in our families and in our churches. Perhaps we were taught, in one way or another, that true forgiveness occurs only when we forget the anger and hurt consequent to particular words and/or actions of others.

The reality for many of us, however, is that we have never been able to forget certain experiences in our lives. Those experiences are called critical incidents because they changed our lives irrevocably. The nature of such experiences varies from person to person. If a critical incident involves pain and suffering, with concomitant hurt and anger, our challenge is to forgive and remember. In other words, we must eventually let go of our desire to punish and get even with the other. In so doing, we remember the incident in order to heal ourselves—and get on with our lives.

Generally, we are changed forever by critical incidents. Things are never the same afterward, but we can and must move on in order to lead healthier psychological and spiritual lives. In a process both psychological and spiritual, we call on our own resources and, at the same time, call on God to aid us in our journey. In some cases of hurt and anger in our lives, the pain is so great that we need God's ongoing help to let go of our desire for punishment and revenge.

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

In these reflections, forgiveness is explored as both a decision and a process for self-healing, a getting on with one's life. It is differentiated from reconciliation in that forgiveness is a personal decision to pardon another (or even oneself). Here, forgiveness is defined as a letting go of one's desire for punishment, revenge, or getting even. It does not require the other's permission, approval, or knowledge. In fact, at times, the other person may not even be aware that one has been hurt by something he or she said or did.

Reconciliation (not used in the formal sense of the sacrament of reconciliation), on the other hand, is described as mutual forgiveness, if and when this can happen. Reconciliation is a process in which the persons concerned experience enough mutual trust to come together in order to ask for and receive forgiveness from each other. It is based on a win/win premise related to differences, rather than the dualistic right/wrong, win/lose premise a number of us have been taught. In reciprocity there is a concomitant and ongoing willingness to continue this process of reconciliation.

The underlying premise for these reflections is that forgetting, as we know it—that is, no longer remembering, "wiping" something from one's mind—is not

integral to forgiving. Rather, the premise for forgiving is remembering, in order to heal ourselves through the letting go of the desire to punish the other.

FORGIVENESS

What is forgiveness? Let's put it in context. When I experience physical, psychological, or spiritual hurt and pain within intrapersonal and/or interpersonal interactions, I instinctively want to protect myself. One way to do that is to get even ("an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth").

The sources of most of our hurt and pain, and hence our forgiveness "problems," include ourselves, our parents, our God, and significant others in our lives.

Forgiveness is holistic; it is my letting go of the desire to get even, to get revenge, to punish myself (intrapersonal) or others (interpersonal).

A HEALING PROCESS

Forgiveness is both a decision and a process. It is a decision that I want to heal myself. It is also a process, in that it entails my being gentle with myself as I go through the journey of letting go of my desire for punishment and revenge.

Forgiveness does not mean that in this decision and process, I eventually come to condone and forget what has happened—not at all. In some ways, that notion of forgiving and forgetting is precisely what has blocked many of us from achieving forgiveness.

Rather, forgiveness means that while I do not condone what has happened to me, I eventually can pardon the person involved. In so doing, I gradually come to see that person as separate from his or her actions. I forgive that person because he or she is a person created and loved by God.

As I let go of my desire to get even or punish the person, I let go of my self-punishment by releasing the energy I had been using to keep the hurt alive—releasing that energy for new life.

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he had to forgive another, Jesus gave a startling answer: "I say to you, not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21–23). What Jesus was telling us through that response, using the variable of the biblical number seven, is that forgiveness is limitless and an ongoing part of our lives. Forgiveness may also take a long time, even a lifetime.

WHY FORGIVE?

At any given point in the decision and process of forgiving, I may not even have the desire to forgive

the other person. I feel so much pain, violation, injustice, and infringement that I just want to even the score. This is a normal defense; it's what I do with it that matters.

As we read in scripture, "There is a season . . ." (Eccles. 3:3). There is indeed a season to be gentle with oneself in this process and, at the same time, to pray for the desire to eventually forgive. Jesus has assured us, "Ask and you shall receive" (Matt. 7:7).

In the long term, the one I harm most by not forgiving is myself. To hold on to a hurt or grudge saps my psychological and spiritual energy, paving the way for negativity, cynicism, passive aggressiveness, and spiritual ennui. Forgiveness is a gradual realization that I cannot control another.

STEPS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a process in which I name, own, and bless my pain and hurt, and then move on. In this journey, I take steps to heal myself psychologically and spiritually. In calling these the steps of forgiveness, it is important to note that they are not linear. Rather, both the decision and the process aspects of forgiveness have an ebb and flow, particularly at the beginning.

NAMING

When I can name my hurt and pain, I have embarked on the first step of forgiveness. I begin to move away from denying and forgetting the event, or thinking that it wasn't as bad as I had "imagined," or even perhaps believing that in some way I deserved what happened.

In this first step of the process of healing myself psychologically and spiritually, I let go of the secrecy, shame, and guilt that may be part of my inability to get on with my life. In telling my story to a trusted listener, or in simply writing out my story, I feel believed and accepted as I remember the details of what another said or did and how it affected me.

As noted earlier, the offending person may never know that I've forgiven him or her. In fact, that person may not even know I felt hurt within the context of a certain interaction. Because forgiveness is a personal decision and process, I do not need the other person's permission, approval, or knowledge in order to forgive him or her. As the one who has felt the pain and hurt, I alone make the decision to forgive.

For any number of reasons, I may decide that I can't go directly to the offending person to share my story of hurt and pain. Perhaps it is not "safe" in one way or another to go directly to that person, or perhaps he or she is no longer alive. However, such vari-

The first step of the process of healing oneself psychologically and spiritually is to let go of the secrecy, shame, and guilt that may be part of one's inability to get on with life

ables do not preclude my forgiving. I can forgive someone whether he or she is dead or alive.

OWNING

When I own my hurt and pain, I can fully feel in my being what I have experienced in the painful event. Owning, the second step in forgiveness, is a more in-depth process than naming.

Owning the hurt and pain is saying that it's okay to feel; it is being in touch with, saying yes to, my God-given emotions. At the same time, it is being gentle with myself about having felt hurt and pain in a particular situation. In owning my feelings, I acknowledge that it's normal and natural to feel such emotions, even "seventy times seven."

Owning is also about coming to grips with the realization that I am the author of what I feel; no one else can make me feel any emotion. In this step, I move gradually from thoughts like "You hurt me" to thoughts like "I felt hurt when you did or said that." I come to own the depth of the emotions I experienced in the event.

At the same time, owning my hurt and pain highlights the fact that it is my interpretation of a particular event, action, or word that results in what I feel. I see that although I experience feelings in relation to my intrapersonal life, many of my feelings surface within my interpersonal interactions. I move from feeling that I am a passive victim with no control over myself, to understanding that I am the author of my emotions; they come from within.

We see this exemplified when a number of people

experience the same external event but have totally different individual reactions and responses. Our own interpretations come from our socialization, training, values, biases, and prejudices. This does not make them any less real than anyone else's.

OWNING IS NOT CONDONING

The owning step of forgiveness does not consist of denying or condoning the personal and/or systemic hurt, violence, breaches of trust, and injustice that many of us have experienced. It is in no way meant to encourage a stance of self-blame ("If only I had/hadn't said/done . . .") or a "blame the victim" mentality ("You really deserved this. You should/shouldn't have said/done . . ."). Instead, it is a step to move away from feeling the victim.

The owning aspect of forgiveness does not necessarily mean either that I will continue in or renew my relationship with the other person. What owning does mean though, is that I am integrating what has happened in my life with the dawning realization that it may mean an end to a particular relationship. It may also mean a possible reconciliation and a continuation of the relationship, albeit at a different level.

Regardless of the eventual outcome of the relationship in question, a part of me dies when I hold on to a hurt or a grudge for years and years—perhaps my self-esteem, my spontaneity, my laughter, my energy, my dreams. In fact, I keep myself in the victim role by giving over my personal power and the responsibility for my life to another. Getting stuck at this stage of forgiveness occurs often, because subconsciously or even unconsciously, people find that playing and replaying their "tapes" of hurt and pain means they don't have to take responsibility for moving on in their lives. Blaming others and learned helplessness become a way of life.

BLESSING

The blessing stage of forgiveness is reached when, after naming and owning my hurt, I can integrate it into my life as a significant part of my life. In so doing, I am in fact saying, "I am who I am today because of—not in spite of—that critical incident, that event, the hurt, the pain." Blessing the hurt is a coming home to who I really am amid life's sorrows and joys.

I recognize that at times, life just doesn't seem fair, and I focus on how I respond to life in such situations. If I believe I am interconnected to myself, to others, to the universe, and to my God, then my blessing myself and my life is both an integration and a conversion of who I am becoming at each moment, through life's vicissitudes.

Another way to see blessing in the context of forgiveness is to look at it as living my life as fully as I can in both the expected and unexpected. In the expected, I may feel I have control over what is happening, whereas in the unexpected, I realize how little control I have in many areas, including what another person says or does. The challenge for each of us is to live as fully as we can in the unexpected as we plan and live the expected. Integrity and conversion characterize the decision and process of blessing both the unexpected and expected in our lives.

MOVING ON

Moving on, an integral part of forgiveness, stems from the decision to live in the now. It is letting go of the past as I work through it—as I name, own, and bless it. In many ways, I move on not to regret the past but to remember it, in order to heal myself.

I perceive that I am moving on when I am able to remember a critical incident of the past without feeling the horrific hurt and pain that once accompanied the memory. Although I may always feel a certain sadness as I remember a particular event, my psychological and spiritual energy is no longer drained by it. I can now focus my energy on the now as I heal myself. I realize, as T. S. Eliot noted, that “an end is a beginning.”

FORGIVING AND HEALING RITUALS

What are some ways that we can go through the process of forgiving and healing? Deep within the intuitive part of our being, we already know what can help. To add to repertoires we have but have not yet explored, I would suggest engaging in any nonviolent ritual that empowers us and at the same time respects the other person.

One such practice is sharing our stories with a trusted friend, counselor, or member of the clergy. By sharing, I get in touch with my own story; naming it, I come to own it and bless it so that I can move on to living more fully in the now.

Another ritual involves the “empty chair” technique: I sit in front of a chair and imagine that sitting there is the person with whom I experienced hurt

and pain. I share my hurt and pain with that person, and then I sit in the empty chair and respond, as the other person, to what he or she has heard. In this process, the goal is twofold: to empower myself by sharing my story, and to express respect for the other person by “walking in his or her shoes.”

A variation on this technique is to write the offending person a letter in which I share my hurt, and then to respond, on behalf of the other person, to the letter written. Neither letter is mailed. Again, the goal is twofold: I empower myself and respect the other person. As noted earlier, this does not mean condoning what has happened. I attempt to separate the person from his or her words and actions.

It goes without saying that prayer is integral to the decision and process of forgiveness. Again, the type of prayer I refer to here is not that associated with a “forgive and forget” attitude. That kind of prayer doesn’t help us name, own, bless, and move on; we continue, sometimes for years, to deal with past hurts that have taken on lives of their own. People have shared with me the intense pain of past hurts that happened fifty and sixty years ago.

On the path to forgiveness, part of our prayer may be an expression of anger toward God for “allowing” what has happened to us. Anger can be a wonderful emotion; it is a catalyst for change. As scripture invites us, “Be angry, but sin not” (Eph. 4:26).

Another aspect of prayer in the journey of forgiving and healing is asking God to “take away our stony hearts and give us hearts of flesh instead” (Ezek. 36:26), especially when we sense within ourselves an inclination to hold on to the hurt and pain. At one level of our being, we may want to name, own, bless, and move on, but at another level, we recognize that we need God’s help in the process of forgiveness.



Sister Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D., is a program staff member at Queen's House in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. She is a fellow of the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution.

Applying Your Criteria In Making Choices About Ministry

George B. Wilson, S.J.

The community is in chapter. The issue on the floor is what kinds of ministry the community will support. The delegates are debating the list of criteria that are to be used in making such decisions. It's hard going. Finally, one of the delegates says, with some exasperation, "This can't be done. On the one hand we say we want to have ministries in which we can perform direct, 'hands-on' service to the economically disadvantaged. On the other hand we say our ministries have to be financially self-supporting. We've got two criteria that negate each other."

Such situations prompt us to explore a bit more deeply the business of developing criteria to guide subsequent decisions to take action. Whether or not the delegate's position on the question is logically consistent is not of concern. What we need to examine is what the delegates are doing—or, perhaps more important, what they *thought* they were doing.

But first we need to step back a bit and ask where all this discussion about criteria is coming from in the first place. We didn't hear much about it in an earlier era. Now it's part of almost every religious chapter. What has happened?

SCARCITY CREATES NEED FOR CRITERIA

Our society entered a new stage sometime during the past twenty to twenty-five years (I leave it to

others to pinpoint the onset and causes). Suddenly we were confronted with the issue of limits. It showed up in the realm of natural resources, as we began to realize that the basic elements on which our world depends for its survival are in fact not available in unlimited supply. In business, the issue of limits arose when changed conditions made big corporations realize that they could no longer maintain the large work forces they had built in an earlier era. In health care we began to ask ourselves how we could use limited human and financial resources wisely in the face of ever-expanding demand and considered saying no to some technologically available options. At the macro level, the image of our planet as a tiny, fragile space traveler began to take hold in our consciousness slowly—ever so slowly—and impelled us to raise questions and propose steps that previous generations had not realized they should be contemplating.

The church, of course, has not been immune to this change in consciousness. Though the issue of limits manifests itself in other arenas as well (most notably in terms of financial constraints), it manifests itself most dramatically for the church in terms of the diminishing pool of personnel available for lifetime service in religious congregations or as ordained diocesan clergy. Where to situate these precious, scarce resources? Where is the greatest good?

Limits and scarcities force us to ask ourselves hard questions that may concern our basic identity

DECISION MAKING IN LIMIT SITUATIONS

One consequence of a new experience of limits is that the kind of decision making required if people are to be responsive to the situation takes on a different psychological cast. At the very least, the realities inevitably evoke a greater intentionality in making choices.

When individuals or groups have more than enough resources at their disposal, there is a natural tendency to be liberal, almost unthinking, in expending or committing resources. Imelda Marcos didn't have to devote as much thought to the decision to buy a pair of shoes as a single mother on welfare does. When things begin to get scarcer, though, we have to ask ourselves harder questions—questions that may concern our basic identity. Consider the victims of the Los Angeles earthquakes, and how often they said things like, "It made me rethink what is important in life" or "I don't have the same priorities I used to." Some years ago, a priest who was the personnel director of a large archdiocese said to me, "We have to be much more attentive to the needs of our personnel today. When we used to have tons of applicants, we could burn personnel. We can't do that anymore."

CONSCIOUS CRITERIA

Once a decision-making process becomes more intentional, the issue of discriminating criteria inevitably comes to the fore. If we can't do all the things we used to be able to do, what are we going to say no to? And what are we going to say yes to? What principles will guide those choices? What's more im-

portant to us? (The latter is really another form of the basic question, What do we stand for? or, in even starker terms, Who are we?)

Decisions have, of course, always been made on the basis of criteria. Superiors were always under the influence of certain values that led them to accept this work and decline that offer, to send this person and not that one. The criteria may have been no more profound than the fact that the superior had a good breakfast that morning or didn't particularly cotton to a given pastor's lack of manners.

Indeed, the superior might have been at a loss to explain just what the criteria were, but they were there—implicit, to be sure, but operative.

Two things are different in today's world. First, there has been a paradigm shift away from a parent-child model of membership in religious communities as well as other organizations. Second, adult members of organizations are less inclined to overlook evident discrepancies between the criteria that leaders profess to use in making decisions and those that are really operative. When authority is used arbitrarily or even abusively, the zone of legitimacy people will grant to authorities narrows correspondingly. In a large archdiocese that announced the closing of several parishes, a suburban woman who is generally supportive of authority was heard to say, "The bishop may say the closures were dictated by economics, but from the choices made, it's clear to me that the church is turning its back on the poor in the city."

In a time of scarcity, decisions presented without clear rationales are no longer acceptable—and members of organizations want some say in determining the rationales for all decisions. Conscious articulation of, and basic agreement about, criteria for choices becomes a prime determinant of organizational cohesion.

THE NATURE OF CRITERIA

Let us return to our chapter delegate and his or her dilemma of the competing criteria. The problem with the delegate's statement lies not with the assessment that the two criteria under consideration might be inconsistent. Rather, it lies in the expectation that any two criteria *won't* be in tension with one another. In any decision worth the time to debate it, the criteria are always multiple and therefore always in tension with one another. Build your ministry priorities solely on the basis of the discerned gifts and leanings of the individual members, and you make the possibility of continued corporate sponsorship of anything problematic. Bring into the equation the views of those you are presently serving (because they deserve to be considered), and you may find that the

criterion of risk taking for the sake of the gospel is in jeopardy—because those who have enjoyed the services of the religious community for so long will tug at the community to continue the good work it has been doing.

The mistake lies in unconsciously assuming that once the community has completed the hard work of hammering out a list of solid criteria, making specific choices will simply be a matter of tallying up the bottom line. Criteria don't work like that. Perhaps the word *criteria* inclines us to expect more of them than they can really provide; maybe we'd be better off calling them indicators. Taken in isolation, that is what each criterion is—one indicator to be juxtaposed with several, or even many, others. By endorsing a particular criterion, the community is really saying, "If a given option exhibits a particular potentiality, we will consider that fact a serious indicator that we should choose it—but we need to put it up against other indicators as well."

DECISION MAKING IS ART, NOT SCIENCE

The deeper roots of this misunderstanding may lie in the overrational ideal implicit in contemporary American culture. The rationalistic model of science (further reinforced by the digital, yes-no mindset engendered by computers) leads us to see the application of criteria to the making of a choice among alternatives as if it were a mechanical summation of discrete quantities that produce a self-evident answer. One provincial, after an extended conversation within his province, voiced his disappointment this way: "I thought they would give me the answers." Ironically, it is probably true that rather than providing answers, what the articulation of criteria does is to help us ask the right questions. When we have a clear set of criteria, we know better what we are looking for when considering any given option. And if we are attentive at all, we will know how complex is the process of actually choosing among real options.

MEANING FROM THE GESTALT

Ultimately, what is at stake in human decision making is not science but wisdom. It involves the always imperfect matching of a gestalt constructed of multiple criteria against the gestalt of each option under consideration. Because each concrete alternative is finite, it will fulfill some of the criteria (perhaps very well) but will also fall short (perhaps very far) of fulfilling others. At the end of the laborious process of chiseling out and adopting the criteria to be used, there will still be a moment of actual commitment to

An effort to develop common criteria for executive decisions can regenerate a community voice

an incarnational alternative. And that will involve further choice and freedom and responsibility: saying no to one mixed good in order to say yes to another mixed good.

IS THE EXERCISE WORTH THE EFFORT?

Our reflections seem to have put us in a quandary. If, after the hard work of trying to stake out common ground about the criteria for eventual decisions, the decisions themselves still remain genuine choices among noncommanding alternatives, what have we gained? Those who do the final deciding remain free to do as they please. What's the use?

Well, first of all, the debate about what criteria to apply, what values to give greater attention to, helps us define ourselves and shape our identity. That is no mean goal to pursue when the panoply of needs that surround us might pull us in so many directions as to immobilize us from taking any action at all, or so disperse our efforts as to dilute their impact on anything. Without some focus, however diffuse, the collectivity ceases to be a body with an identity.

Furthermore, the articulation of criteria, like any effective policy, provides guidance to the leaders who have to make the incarnational choices. Positively, it helps them narrow the field of their discernment; some alternatives can be removed from the playing field almost at the outset. Negatively, the effort, while leaving room for discretion and judgment on the part of the leaders, has the effect of challenging them to self-critique and minimizing the potentially harmful effects of their personal whims and unexamined biases. The intentionality of the process generates in the psyche of any serious leader a voice that must be heeded.

The criteria conversation will not by itself eliminate all arbitrariness on the part of deciders. They will remain human and fallible, just like the people they are called to lead.

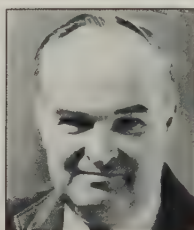
Nor can it generate in the people who are being called to support the leaders' eventual decisions the willingness to put their trust in them. A community that, for whatever reason, has arrived at the conclusion that its leaders are simply going to ignore the voice of the membership and do what their personal visions or interests dictate, has a far more difficult task ahead of it than even the arduous task of clarifying its common priorities. Its leaders have to earn again the precious gift of the members' trust, and that can be achieved only by performance, by demonstrating their trustworthiness one step at a time. The members of the community will still have to reach down into their wounded psyches and find the gift of the Spirit, which will free them to let go of their fear of yet another disappointment and to place their confidence outside their own egos.

RESISTING FRAGMENTATION OF COMMUNITY

What the effort at developing common criteria for executive decisions can do is regenerate a commu-

nity voice—the common challenge that commands the attention of members and leaders alike. When a list of agreed-on criteria has been brought forth from the calls experienced by each individual member, and then brought into coherence by listening and debate and modulation, something new exists—a song that will not go away. Once voiced, it has the power to move mountains of inertia and fear.

Agreeing together on the right questions to ask in the midst of our choosing will not do the work of selecting our specific responses. It can, however, help us resist the pull to fragmentation when our leaders have to call us to support quite different concrete choices than we ourselves might have made. And that is much indeed.



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Viewing the Parish As a System

Thomas P. Sweetser, S.J.

I entered the Jesuits because I was interested in physics. I taught physics for three years before ordination. One key tenet of physics is that everything is interrelated. You can't study the earth without taking into account the sun, the moon, the planets, even comets and asteroids. All these make up a system—the solar system. Looking at just one body in the system is never enough. I left physics and went on to a career in sociology and pastoral ministry. The concept of interrelatedness, however, stayed with me.

In studying psychology, I discovered a similar approach. When one counsels a client, it is not enough to ask that person to talk only about his or her own experience. It is essential to ask the client to also talk about the history of his or her family and loved ones. We are all affected by our network of friends and relatives; we are part of a relational system. Whatever pain, joy, confusion, or anxiety we are experiencing at this moment has its roots in our connection with the system of interrelated persons that belongs to our history.

Now that I am a full-time consultant to Catholic parishes, I am able to draw on my knowledge of systems theory and use it to better understand how a modern parish operates.

A good way to symbolize a parish from a systems point of view is to picture a mobile hanging from

the ceiling. The mobile consists of a number of objects balanced by sticks and string. If left undisturbed, it remains still. But move one part of that hanging mobile, and the whole system of interconnected parts begins to move.

Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, both Protestant ministers who teach theology in Western Canada, have written a book entitled *The Equipping Pastor*. They use the word *Equipping* to describe a facilitating, empowering, enabling pastor. They use systems analysis as a framework for their assessment of how a parish works. In reading their book, I found that it reflected much of my own experience of parishes.

The book contains ten principles associated with a systems approach to ministry. I have adapted these principles to a Catholic situation and have found them helpful in naming what is happening on the local level of our church. A similar analysis could be used for the institutional church as a whole, but I will confine the scope of this article to the parish scene and, in particular, to parish leadership.

WHOLE IS MORE THAN PARTS

The first principle of systems theory is that the whole is more than the parts. That simple concept has great implications for a parish staff, council, or

committees. What this principle means is that the group has a life of its own that is beyond the experience of any one member. Suppose you are the music director of the parish. You may try to do your job and stay out of the way of the school principal or the youth minister. Impossible! All three of you are part of the staff system. All three of you are affected and influenced by the leadership mix. So long as you are a member of the staff of this parish, you and your work fit into "the way we do things around here."

In a sense, the system has a life of its own that goes beyond the activities of any of the people who make up the system. On the positive side, the parish system as a whole, or even the smaller staff system, can carry the group along when the individuals within it are not functioning to their fullest potential. On the other hand, the system can appear to have a life of its own, and can seem impervious to any change or adaptation.

CHANGING PARTS CHANGES WHOLE

Although a system may appear static and resistant to change, any member within that system can affect the way it operates. This leads to the second principle of systems theory: Any change in the parts affects the whole. Too often, we get caught up in a situation we don't like, and we blame the person "in charge": "This parish is going nowhere because the pastor is stuck in the Middle Ages." "The president of the council is impossible. She has no concept of how to run a meeting." "The school is a disaster. The principal is so disorganized." But from a systems point of view, any person who is part of a system can change "the way we do things around here."

Let us return to that mobile hanging from the ceiling. Touch any part, and the whole mobile moves. If a staff or council or school faculty is getting bogged down, change yourself, and the group will change. There is no doubt that a new person joining a staff makes it a new staff. But keep the same people and change the behavior of even one person, and the staff will also change.

I can remember a time when I returned to work after a week-long retreat. I was relaxed and laid-back—so much so that the others on the staff were concerned about me. They could see I was happy and healthy, but I was not my active self. For the next few weeks the staff as a whole was more laid-back and relaxed. It was a wonderful time, but little work was being accomplished in the office. Eventually, the tempo picked up. I got reconnected to the work, and the group began to function more productively. For those few weeks, however, my personal behavior change affected the entire staff system.

I sometimes hear complaints about how awful a particular parish is, how nothing can be done to change it. I respond by saying, "The first step in changing the system is to change yourself, your own perceptions, your modeling, your way of acting, your behavior. Eventually, this will change the whole system."

CHANGES TAKE TIME

I also tell people to be patient. That is because the third principle of systems theory is that changes take time. It is true that any change in the parts changes the whole system, but not right away. Touching one piece of a hanging mobile may not affect the other pieces immediately. The energy, however, will be translated throughout the system, and the entire mobile will eventually move. Not all the parts will move at once or in unity, but the mobile will move.

How long have girls been functioning as altar servers at parish liturgies? In some places, at least ten years. The practice of allowing girls to be altar servers started out slowly and without much notice. Other parishes followed suit. Rome has now approved the practice. It has taken years, but the system is changing. The change is not only about altar servers, of course. The whole system is being prepared, by this change and many others, for a new role of women in leadership positions in the church. Changes take time, but they are happening. The entire church, and especially the local parish, is being altered by the experience.

EACH PART REFLECTS WHOLE

The fourth principle is that each element in a system reflects the whole. Just as any change in the parts affects the whole, so the whole puts its stamp on the parts.

When I start working with a parish, I enjoy watching how the staff operates. The mode of dress, the furniture in the office, the position of the coffee pot, the use of titles all quickly reveal how the staff functions. We often say that the pastor sets the tone of the parish. This one person's leadership has a profound input. Much of what happens, however, is beyond the pastor's influence. The parish system itself dictates how the subparts operate. If the parish has a reputation for friendliness, every group and organization in the parish reflects warmth and openness. If prayer is a staple in the parish, much attention is given to prayer at meetings and parish gatherings. If outreach to the needy is part of the larger system, awareness of the disadvantaged is evident in parish functions. Each part reflects the whole.

When a new person enters the system, there is a slow but relentless change in that person's behavior. He or she begins to take on some of the aspects of the larger system: the way people act as they arrive for work in the morning, the way coffee breaks and lunch take place, the way scheduling happens or decisions are made. All these predictable patterns of the larger group are imitated and reflected by the people who make up the group.

GOOD SYSTEMS HAVE INTERDEPENDENT PARTS

The fifth principle is that the most effective systems have interdependent parts. We have already mentioned that a system is made up of interconnected parts that affect each other and the whole. What this fifth principle adds is that the more healthy human systems have people who are neither dependent nor independent. A system that has one or more persons who lean on the group for self-identity and purpose is going to be dragged down by their dependency. Much time and energy is spent holding up the dependent parts. The mobile hanging from the ceiling gets lopsided. If the strings are misplaced, the balance is off; the mobile droops and is unstable.

A similar situation occurs when members of a staff, parish, or school system try to remain independent from the whole. A "lone ranger" mentality can have a disastrous effect on the efficient operation of a system. One person wants to go it alone: "Leave me alone so I can do my work/ministry/visiting/music." A system that has people working on their own, independent of one another, is what we call a "crowd" model. It is unstable and inefficient, as well as being a poor witness of community spirit to the rest of the parish.

In order to put the system to good use, the parts must be interdependent, each with its own identity and integrity, but each connected and interactive with the others of the system. Imagine what chaos our solar system would be in if Pluto or Jupiter decided to go it alone. Not only would they spin into the sun and burn up; the rest of the planets would be out of sync as well. It would take some time to establish a balance once again. So, too, with a parish system that contains parts that want to "go it alone."

TENSION BETWEEN WHOLE AND PARTS

The sixth principle is that in a healthy system, there is an inherent tension between the goals, vision, and direction of the whole and the individual goals and visions of the members. Whenever a person joins a staff and is willing to be part of the staff system, he or she is caught in a dilemma: "How

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much do I give up of my own desires and dreams for this parish or staff in order to 'fit in' around here? How much do I hang on to my own aspirations and insist that the staff allow for my own individuality, gifts, and insights?" This struggle contributes to the health of the staff because it keeps it interdependent.

Take, for example, a staff that is planning to foster small faith communities in the parish. All members agree this is a good plan to follow. Attitudes differ, however, as to how best to carry it out. One person insists that all else should be put on hold in the parish until the small groups are formed. Another thinks forming a pilot group of key leaders would be a good way to begin. A third person believes that it would be best to invite those who wish to join small groups to attend a parish mission, but to keep other programs going as well. Each person has a different idea of how to foster faith communities in the parish. If the staff system is working well, then each of these individual approaches will be listened to, evaluated, and pulled into a common plan of action. The individual members are confident that they can express their opinions and still feel supported by the group. At the same time, they are willing to adjust their own views for the good of the whole and the success of the project. The tension between individual initiative and group discernment keeps the system in balance. If, on the other hand, one dominant member refuses to adjust to the group's direction, the system can go into a tailspin.

MANAGE PROCESS

This brings us to the seventh principle: It is best to manage the process and not the people in the system.

**If members examine
their system's culture
and evaluate its effects
on the group's daily
operations, they will
have a better grasp of
what drives the system
and what changes
are needed**

This is a subtle but important rule to keep in mind when dealing with parish, staff, or school systems. Too often we are tempted to solve a problem either by coming down hard on an individual who doesn't measure up or who causes difficulty, or by placating that person and giving in to his or her wishes.

Our American culture makes this mistake when dealing with violence in the cities: we punish perpetrators by locking them up in jail and throwing away the key. That's managing people, not managing the process. If, on the other hand, we were to work the process, we would look into why violence happens, and try to correct the process instead of the individuals. Part of the process of violence in our country is the easy accessibility of guns, especially assault weapons. If these lethal weapons were not available, the level of violence would be greatly reduced. Managing the process of violence, in other words, means making guns less available. That is only part of the problem, of course, but it is a start.

On the parish level, the liturgies have no spark. The temptation is to come down on the presider or the music director or the art and environment group or the planners. That is centering on persons, not on the process. Looking at liturgy from a systems viewpoint means analyzing the weekend mass schedule as a whole. What type of people come to each mass? What are their needs and desires? What would spark the people attending might be different in each case. The spark for the 12:30 p.m. mass might be less emphasis on music and more emphasis on short, to-the-point homilies. The spark for the 9:00 a.m. fam-

ily mass might be a children's choir and chocolate doughnuts after mass. In this case, working the process means shaping each mass to fit the clientele rather than keeping all the masses the same.

For a staff, working the process might mean that rather than having each member make up a job description and discuss it with the pastor, the entire staff would decide to gather together to learn about what each person actually does, what he or she enjoys, what he or she does and does not want to continue doing. This serves as a joint effort at sharing tasks so that all play an equal part in the ministry. Managing the process of job descriptions can also serve as an evaluation of staff performance. This is approached as an evaluation of the whole staff, however, not as a measure of the success or failure of any one person.

ATTEND TO UNDERLYING CULTURE

The eighth principle is to attend to the system's culture. This includes the group's unspoken values, traditions, and assumptions. Every parish has an unspoken mode of operating. For example, if Thursday is the pastor's day off, everyone knows that life at the office is more casual on that day. Or there is an assumption that the school dominates the parish, so the school gets more money, attention, and care than any other program. Or there is a tradition of starting every council meeting with prayer, although never for more than five minutes, lest the coughing and fidgeting become intense. Part of the parish culture may be never to hold hands during the 7:30 mass on Sunday morning. Another assumption may be that the Saturday evening mass is always "dead"; nothing will ever bring it to life. These are some of the unwritten rules of the group's culture.

Other deeper issues affect the culture as well: "If you want to join this parish staff, we presume that you profess a progressive understanding of church, one that favors inclusive language and social awareness." "A willingness to run for this pastoral council means accepting a consensus style of decision making in which there are no winners or losers." "Working in this parish office requires that nothing said at work is repeated outside these walls."

Attending to such underlying values and assumptions sometimes means stopping the regular routine of work long enough to look at the group's culture, see what it contains, and evaluate how it affects the daily operation of the organization. This includes acknowledging some of the rules and values the culture contains and how these affect the daily interaction of the members. The culture changes with the makeup of the group, but it has a surprising tenacity and

longevity. Bucking the system often means challenging unwritten values and assumptions. It is no easy task and most often means failure, at least in the short term.

If, however, the group spends time trying to articulate the system's culture, its members will have a much better grasp of what drives the system and what makes the group what it is. Members will also have a better chance of changing the system if they are able to name its underlying culture.

KEEPING BOUNDARIES OPEN

The ninth principle is to keep the boundaries open and permeable. Disastrous examples of closed systems are all too common. The recent tragic end of the Branch Davidian sect in Texas illustrates the dangers of a closed system that does not have permeable boundaries.

On a parish level, the group that subtly closes out membership starts feeding upon itself and consumes its own resources. The Holy Name Society or Women's Club that wonders why it can't get any young members (under 60) is experiencing the result of closing the gates to the forces of change and becoming a clique or in-group. A council that is self-contained and has little effect on the parish wonders why no one knows it exists. A youth group that caters to just one style of activity has difficulty with its image. A charismatic renewal prayer group that has little to do with the mainstream functions of the parish wonders why it is on the margin of the parish. The boundaries surrounding these groups are well-defined. Much of the energy of each group is used up in protecting the group from outside forces and shielding its members from becoming "contaminated."

If, on the other hand, a system is open to the surrounding environment and forces of change, if it stays alert to aspects of the larger society that affect its operation, it will remain alive and healthy. Also, if the group has a purpose beyond itself, so that it is not self-serving, the organization will discover new energy to fuel its activity. The irony is that a system that "circles the wagons" and tries to protect its own interests will eventually die. A system that keeps giving of itself and spending its energies outside itself finds the life and energy to grow to new heights. This is a systems approach to the gospel axiom, "the one who loses his or her own life will gain it."

TRIANGLES CAN DOMINATE

The final principle of systems theory as applied to parish life is the most important: triangles, if maintained, will dominate the system. Returning to fam-

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ily systems theory, suppose that two parents send their teenage son to a counselor because of a drug problem. Focusing on the teenager, however, may not solve the difficulty. It is likely that a triangle exists between the father, mother, and son, and that it is sapping the life out of the entire family. The father is forceful, threatening to turn the son out of the house unless he abides by "the rules." The mother comes to the son's rescue, acting as a buffer between father and son. From the teenager's point of view, the father is the oppressor and he is the victim. From the parents' point of view, however, the son is the oppressor; the mother may be the victim, and the father the rescuer. The players change costumes, but the triangle remains. The counselor will try to bring all the parties into a dialogue and help them reframe the triangle—that is, to figuratively step out of the triangle in order to view the situation more objectively. An avenue to health is opened up if those in the triangle can look at it from outside and see what it is and how it has consumed not only their own energies but also the energies of others who are in relationships with them.

Parishes also have energy-consuming triangles. For example, a conflict may exist between the pastor and his pastoral associate. It is not a passing conflict that can be confronted and managed; rather, it is an ongoing tension that drains the energies of the entire staff. When we encounter such a persistent difficulty, we look for an enabler or rescuer—that is, the one who keeps the friction alive. Suppose the pastoral associate is a person with a strong, dominant personality, whereas the pastor is shy and nonassertive. Such a situation need not be problematic; in fact, the two might make an effective team. If, on the

other hand, someone else on the staff—perhaps the secretary or the director of religious education (DRE)—becomes the rescuer, then a triangle is set up: the pastoral associate becomes the oppressor, and the pastor the victim.

In one such situation, a pastor asked a consultant to help “solve” a conflict between the youth director and the DRE. The two disagreed about how to manage a group process for an eighth-grade religious education class. In investigating the situation, the consultant soon discovered that the pastor himself was involved. One day he had passed by the room while the class was being led by the youth director. The noise coming out of the room was too loud for the pastor, so he called the DRE over to quiet the group down. She went in and told the youth director, in front of the class, to “tone down the group.” The youth director did as she was instructed, but she was infuriated with the DRE for interfering. Analysis of the situation showed that all three were caught in a triangle that was affecting the energies of the entire staff. At first the pastor was the oppressor, the DRE the rescuer, and the youth director the victim. The tables quickly turned, however, when the youth director blew up at the DRE and then the pastor tried to soothe the youth director’s ruffled feathers. He became the rescuer, the youth director the oppressor, and the DRE the victim. This one incident was part of a deeper friction that existed among these three individuals. The triangle continued to soak up the energies of the group. It kept people from doing their ministry effectively. To deal with the issue, we had to help the pastor, the DRE, and the youth director, in the presence of and with the help of the entire staff, to step outside the triangle they had created. They had to reframe it, in other words, and look more objectively at what was happening.

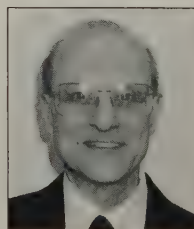
Not all conflicts on staffs and councils or in parish groups involve triangles. But if the conflicts keep simmering and consuming the energy of the system, then a triangle probably exists. To bring the system back to health, the triangle must be named. The key

figures need to be invited to reframe the triangle by stepping out of it and looking at the situation more objectively. People need to be encouraged to seek ways to correct their behavior and rechannel their energies in a more positive direction.

PARISH AS SYSTEM

The list below recaps the ten principles of systems theory that apply to parish life. These principles can aid in understanding a very complex and sometimes confusing organization. The list can be used as a checklist for analyzing your own situation. The approach might provide new insights into how to make your staff, council, school, organization, or parish more healthy and effective.

1. The whole is more than the parts.
2. Any change in the parts affects the whole.
3. Changes take time; the whole system is being affected.
4. Each subsection reflects the whole.
5. The most effective systems have interdependent parts.
6. A healthy system has an inherent tension between group and individual goals, visions, and directions.
7. It is best to manage the process, not the people.
8. Attend to the system’s culture (values, traditions, assumptions).
9. Keep boundaries open and permeable.
10. Triangles, if maintained, will dominate the system.



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A Dark Passage Through Melancholy

Anthony J. Butler, S.M.A.

Today, for the first time in many months, I celebrated public mass. Yesterday I walked into town and back, unaccompanied. I can do these things now because today I am free of depression. My life has begun again. I am very conscious that I am, and always will be, prone to a recurrence of the illness, and that frightens me. But I have today.

I am but one of the 10,000 who are diagnosed each year in Ireland as having a depressive illness, only one of the 200,000 men and women in this country who suffer with depression at this moment. If you have ever suffered from depression, you may recognize some of your story in my words. If not, then no words of mine can convey the dread, the emptiness, and the very ache of depression.

My first episode of depression was eighteen years ago, and I knew from the experience that I was going downhill. All the signs were there: lack of concentration, confusion, dissociation, gradual withdrawal from people, lack of interest; overeating, smoking too much, not returning phone calls, not opening letters, letting dirty laundry pile up; thoughts of suicide, fear of leaving the house, fear of staying in; taking to bed as an escape. But I kept on working.

But was I really working? I was on automatic pilot. I was always and ever there for parishioners—there to listen, there to celebrate, there to serve. I put my

day off on hold if pastoral necessity emerged. In fact, my work was a welcome distraction to stop me from thinking. So much of depression is cerebral, yet I could also feel it as an ache in the very pit of my stomach. I was simply caught up in thinking constantly, involuntarily, about hopelessness, fear, and dread; this took up all my waking hours. I wanted to get out of my head but couldn't. This desire makes useless the nostrums "Stop thinking about yourself" and "Pull yourself together." If only you could!

I vividly remember visiting the hospital and being envious of the patients whose illnesses were apparent, whose wounds were visible. At least you can see what is wrong with them, I thought, but how can you bandage the mind? What medication is there for the pain of being alive?

I also recall officiating at a funeral and feeling envious of the deceased, for whom the pain of life was at last over; at the same time, I was trying to offer sympathy and support for the bereaved. My thinking was split in two. I remember holding on to the lectern, afraid that I would be unable to carry on with the mass, afraid that everything would disintegrate around me. It was a dangerous road that I was traveling.

There is a song in the play *Les Misérables*: "There's the grief that can't be spoken, there's a pain that goes

on and on.” That’s as near as I can come to a definition of how I was feeling. The pain goes on and on and on.

I was coping—just. But the amount of negative energy that just coping demands is too high a price. I was exhausted from coping. Bed was my great escape. I found myself retreating earlier and earlier each evening, terrified that the doorbell would ring, scared of the phone. Darkness was the one element that brought relief. The day brought the pain, and that pain went on and on and on.

GOD SEEMED TO VANISH

In *The Love of God and Affliction*, Simone Weil wrote that “the soul has to go on loving in the emptiness, at least go on wanting to love . . . then one day God will show himself to that soul.” I prayed for that day, bargained for that day, but it never came. Month passed on to month, and I tried to hold on, but the very emptiness I was experiencing turned to nothingness, and in that state God disappeared. I was very frightened.

I wanted to keep on loving—family, friends, God, community, life itself—but it was all slipping away from me. At night, when I couldn’t sleep, I would sit in the church and fire my prayers at the cross. Night brought its own cruel joke: I found that at night the depression ebbed somewhat, and I would make plans for the new day. That day never came. I was tricked, for with each new day the small relief of the night before vanished, and the pain returned. I continued to throw my prayers at the cross until one night, in rage and desperation, I shouted at it: “How dare you!” There was no answer.

There is no other sound
In the darkness but the sound of a man
Breathing, testing his faith
On emptiness, nailing his questions
One by one to an untenanted cross.

(R. S. Thomas, “In Church”)

I felt that I had lost everything. The God of my life was silent. I clung to Mary; surely, as a mother, she would understand the suffering of this other son of hers. I was very frightened; I ran out of hope. By now people were asking “Are you alright?” to which I answered yes. I was unable to gather energy or interest to say otherwise, and the very thought of trying to explain made me weary. My interest in life was slipping away, and I couldn’t be bothered to reach out.

My life was disintegrating. I was surrounded by people who cared—my community, my superior, my friends, my doctor. They were there to help, to lis-

ten. I knew that they cared. But all I wanted to do was to sleep, to sleep forever—to blot out life and light forever. Life was too painful, and nonlife seemed the answer. I became obsessed with the thought of suicide all my waking hours, and my mind would not let this thought go away. It was with me constantly—planning, timing, methods. My mind was paralyzed with such thoughts. I couldn’t get rid of them, and eventually I visited a psychiatrist and explained how I was thinking. I was given medication and told to come back in a week’s time.

AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE

Two days later I woke early, as usual. I went to the sacristy to prepare the vestments and books for that morning’s first mass. I went back to my room, tidied it, emptied the ashtrays, made a cup of coffee, and wrote three short notes. I took the coffee to my bedroom, gathered as many tablets as I could find, and took them with the coffee. I remember having a moment’s fear; then I took my beads in my hands and prayed, “Mary, hold me as you held Jesus”; then I lay back on the bed and went unconscious.

I have no other memory except that of being taken to a psychiatric hospital. I had been found in my room, as I had not turned up for mass, but I have no memory of that time at all. My superior had gone with me to the hospital, stayed with me throughout the rituals of admission, and stayed with me as I was brought to my ward. His presence was reassuring and comforting.

The hospital was a place of safety, and for the first time in a long time, I was unafraid. I needed to be saved from myself. The feeling of being unafraid was the greatest blessing I had. The hospital was security; maybe there I could learn to live again. I was alive and glad to be.

For many, psychiatric hospitals conjure up images of high walls and Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*—images of white coats and scenes out of a late-night movie. In many places the walls have come down, and very enlightened holistic treatment is available, but a stigma is still attached to mental illness because of ignorance and fear. Mental illness and suicide are still Ireland’s great secrets.

My stay in the hospital was to last some months. Because I felt safe and secure, things gradually began to improve. It took time, but I was with people who understood. Mornings were still very bad. I would wake sweating, and this could last for an hour or more. I was afraid to open the curtains, afraid to let the day in, afraid at times to leave my room. Fellow

patients spoke of similar problems and said those problems had eased for them over time; they were a great help to me in my recovery. They encouraged me and gave me strength.

IMPROVEMENT WAS GRADUAL

I slowly began to regain my confidence. With help from behavioral therapists, I progressed from being afraid to leave the hospital to going for a walk (accompanied). In time I was not only walking on my own but also going to shops and buying a newspaper, and eventually I was able to board a bus and go into town. Things like that had been impossible for me for some time prior to my hospitalization; I hadn't been living for a long time. However, my concentration was still confused. Television programs were a jumble of words without meaning or sense, and even the newspaper I bought with my newfound confidence meant little.

I was a patient in a mood disorder program, and those caring for us worked as a team. One afternoon, while attending music therapy, I suddenly began to cry. I cried all that afternoon and into the evening, and I can remember lying on my bed with my arms wrapped around myself, weeping. I grieved my very heart and soul out that day. From time to time a nurse or fellow patient would come and just be with me. No words were spoken, but they were priests to me by their presence.

That was a turning point. The next morning I woke, and for the first time in my illness, my mind was not full of negative thoughts. The great blackness that had met me each morning was not there. I had no feeling of despair, and during that day I experienced moments of real calm. That evening I attended mass for the first time in the hospital oratory.

A VARIETY OF THERAPIES

The weeks passed, and I took part in all the programs: group therapy, anti-tension classes, occupational therapy, discussion groups, play reading, music therapy. Gradually, my confidence was being restored. I was also beginning to see how the confidence of others was gradually coming back to them; it was as if we were waking from a long sleep. Our ward's team even won the table quiz twice in a row, and no Nobel Prize winner was more proud of the prize than we were of ours—a packet of biscuits.

Along with the various therapies, I was regularly seeing my psychiatrist, his registrar, the occupational and behavioral therapists, and the chaplain. Together with the nursing staff, they enabled me to communicate about my feelings, not just about what I was

thinking. Their care was excellent, and they were helpful in every possible way.

I had my ups and downs—good days and the occasional bad day. One weekend I was out of the hospital, and I was suddenly overcome with the thought of suicide and self-destruction. All the angst and terror returned; I was once again frozen with fear. Luckily, this time a friend came by to see me, and I told him how I was feeling. I was afraid that if I told the staff I was thinking about suicide, I would lose the opportunity to leave the hospital on weekends, or I would be taken from my present ward and put somewhere more restrictive—that all the progress I had made was lost. I was slowly sinking again. My friend and I walked for a long time while I told him all my fears. He listened and asked me if I would return to the hospital and tell the staff how I was feeling and what was going through my mind. I went back to the hospital that evening, and he waited with me as I told the nursing officer how the weekend had gone for me. I talked all my feelings and fears through with the nurses and with the medical staff. I chose not to leave the hospital the following weekend; I thought that was best. But every subsequent weekend I left the hospital, and I have not had those thoughts since.

Eventually, I was moved to a convalescent unit. There I had more freedom. I was given back my razor and scissors; prior to that I had to ask to use them each time and return them. Now I was more independent, and my placement in this unit was seen as a move toward going home.

RETURN TO LITURGY

The chaplain asked me if I would assist him in Holy Week. From Passion Sunday to Easter Sunday it was as if I were hearing the scriptures for the first time. Together with fellow patients, we followed the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It was our story also. I was very conscious of this, and somehow was able to identify with the loneliness of Jesus. His desperate cry of abandonment on the cross is still to be heard in the voices of all who suffer. But that cry *was* heard, and what brought that home to me was the gospel story of Thomas. It wasn't the appearing through closed doors but the touching of his wounds that was the sign of Christ's presence and his new glory. Touch the wounds and you meet Christ. I asked God to forgive me my lack of faith and to touch my wounds, that I might live again. It reminded me so much of the words of Thomas Merton in *The Seven-Storey Mountain*—words I had often used as a prayer but was now really understanding for the first time:

Everything that touches you shall burn you.
Do not ask when it will be or how it will be,
it does not matter.
You will taste the true solitude of my anguish
... so that you may become the brother of God,
And learn to know the Christ of the burnt men.

I have seen the hurt that my attempted suicide caused—have been told about it and have felt the anger of those closest to me. Depression can be as hard on family and friends as it is for the sufferer. But I was not thinking straight. I couldn't put up any more with the pain of being alive, the pain of simply living. Eternal sleep seemed the solution, inviting and persistent; no life, no pain. To live with such pain is an agony beyond description. I could feel it in the pit of my stomach; I could hear it in the deadness of my voice.

I felt safe in the company of others while I was depressed. But when I was on my own, the fears and nothingness magnified—and being nothing, I thought, was my answer to feeling nothing.

According to Professor Tom Fahy, "If the latest published figures on Irish suicides are even half way correct, about a thousand such funerals have taken place up and down this country in the past three years alone, that is, at least one each day—and upwards of 20,000 Irish people have lost a loved one through suicide in the last ten years."

SOME WISDOM TO SHARE

My hospitalization was life-saving. Always take seriously any talk or suggestion of suicide. Your presence and your listening can also be life-saving, but you cannot deal with someone's depression on your own. It is important to contact the person's doctor. Expert help is needed at this time, and unfortunately, it is often when someone is coming out of a serious depression that suicide or the thought of suicide can occur. Depression is treatable; it will lift. The situation is not hopeless, despite the pain and the blackness.

If you are suffering with depression, then talk to someone about it. My mistake was in not speaking to my doctor or to a friend. Recognizing the need to talk to someone is the first step toward recovery, and it is best if that someone is a professional in health care or someone whom you value. At one time during my illness I had a mental picture of myself standing on the edge of a desert, with nothing in front of me and nothing on either side. Friends are there to be invited into your life. Speak to them; you are not alone in a desert.

Hold on to the fact that depression can be treated, and there are people who understand and who will

help you. Depression is an illness, not a weakness or a prolonged bad humor.

I will always be prone to a recurrence of the illness. At times that frightens me. I wake now each morning and thank God for the new day, free from fear. I am learning to take care of myself; I look after my diet, get sufficient sleep, and exercise. I attend regular meetings of AWARE, a self-support group for sufferers of depression and their families. I am trying to learn as much as I can about the illness. I have my own small support group also—three people with whom I will always be honest and open about my feelings. I only hope that I will pay as much attention to their needs as they do to mine. I have asked them, in conjunction with my psychiatrist, to make decisions for me if, through a recurrence of depression, I am unable to do so for myself.

Now I feel that I am closer to my family and friends than before. I am sorry for the heartbreak I caused them, because I know how much they love me and care for me.

I believe that I am a bit closer to God now. He has been always with me; that I know now. I am glad to be alive and grateful for the many daily sacraments I receive—the good laugh with a friend, the evening's sunset, listening to music, the psalm that speaks to me, the daily ups and downs of community life, a good movie, the quiet of the chapel at night—all sacraments, all received with joy.

I am ever grateful to those who visited me and those who wrote to me; it meant so much then and still does now. My journey begins again, and my prayer for the rest of the journey is simple: "Lord, touch my wounds, that I may see your glory, and bring me to life."

If you have suffered or do suffer this most awful of all pains, depression, know that it is treatable, that there is life beyond it. It may take time, but the waiting is worth it; there is life on the other side of depression. I hope and pray that you too may hear what was said to me by a friend at the beginning of my illness ("We will get through this together") and by my provincial upon my return from the hospital ("Welcome home").



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A Theory About Families Can Benefit Communities

Brian J. Kelly, Ed.D.

During the years following World War II, the field of psychiatry experienced a tremendous increase in popularity. Research projects abounded as the profession sought to further its understanding of the forces that influence human development. In the 1950s several researchers, operating independently, sought to understand how families function. Their findings led to the understanding that families could be viewed as a single emotional unit.

One of the early pioneers in family research was Murray Bowen, M.D. Bowen conducted research at the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland, where he hospitalized entire families with a schizophrenic member. His observations led to the formulation of a new theory of human functioning, now called Bowen Family Systems Theory. The theory provides the most thorough description of a family as a single emotional unit.

As Bowen's observational research continued over the decades, it became obvious to him that all emotional systems operate on the same principles. An emotional system is defined as a group of individuals who, by virtue of time spent together, are involved in meaningful relationships. Bowen has described how emotional systems such as families, religious communities, groups of coworkers, and other groups function as single emotional units. For

example, a religious community may be viewed as a single emotional unit in which emotions or feelings pass circuitously from individual to individual by means of patterned emotional reactions such as distance, conflict, overfunctioning/underfunctioning, or "triangling."

In observing groups from this perspective, one notices the emergence of predictable patterns of relating. Knowledge of these patterns can provide important information that allows one to manage oneself in relation to others in a way that enhances the functioning of the entire community. In this view, true self-development fosters the development of the entire community.

TENDENCIES IN CONFLICT

Bowen's theory assumes two opposing basic life forces. One life force is a built-in urge for individuality, the development of a separate self, a unique "I." This force is opposed by a drive for togetherness and emotional closeness. The coexistence of these forces sets up tension within individuals and groups, and an enormous amount of energy is required to keep the forces in balance. Put another way, the attempt to balance the forces of individuality and togetherness is the struggle to be a self—

unique and clearly defined—while being in relationships with others who are also striving to be unique selves within the community. Bowen's theory suggests that balance in the pursuit of self-development within community can be achieved in a way that enriches and strengthens both the community and its individual members.

Once Bowen and his associates were able to view the family as an emotional unit, they could view each individual as a functional part of that unit. This "systems" view of people mutually influencing each other represents a broader perspective on a problem and allows people to think differently about it. Such a perspective allows people to view the mutual influencing that occurs among members of an emotional unit and understand how any one member influences, and is influenced by, others.

Bowen Family Systems Theory postulates that symptomatic behavior is the result of two factors: *differentiation of self* and *anxiety*. It is necessary to understand both of these concepts to appreciate and evaluate the usefulness of Bowen's insights.

DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF

Differentiation of self is the way an individual differs in his or her ability to manage self amid obstacles to the achievement of life goals. Although each human begins life totally dependent on others, the life force for individuality rapidly moves each person toward independent functioning. Parents have the task of functioning to allow their children's individuality to emerge. Yet the existence of the counterbalancing togetherness life force prevents people from attaining complete autonomy. The concept of differentiation of self is highly complex, but at its most basic level, differentiation refers to one's ability to know and to act on self-determined goals, beliefs, and life principles despite emotional pulls in other directions.

All human beings are at times controlled by anxiety rather than by self. Anxiety transmitted through relationship networks can shut off clear thinking and change behavior. It is not uncommon for a person to carefully determine a course of action and embark on that course of action, and for that to trigger anxiety in significant others. Their anxiety may be expressed in behaviors such as criticism, distance, or disapproval. This results in the person's changing to conform, only to realize later that the change was produced in reaction to the others' intensity rather than their logic. The more differentiated one is, the more immune one is to this kind of influence. People are also influenced to behave in non-self-determined fashion by praise and approval.

All humans remain reactive in significant relationships throughout life. This reactivity is viewed as an imbalance in the individuality/togetherness life forces. The more reactive one is to family, the more vulnerable one is to the emotional forces in all relationships. This means that all humans are vulnerable to having their actions governed by their reactions to others rather than by self-determination. People differ in the degree to which they are reactive. Those who are very reactive are considered to have a low level of self-differentiation. The lower the level of an individual's self-differentiation, the more relationships interfere with his or her attainment of life goals.

When Bowen was hospitalized toward the end of his life, he was given a copy of the Prayer of Saint Francis. He had never seen it before but remarked that it addressed the idea of differentiation of self. This points out that the goal of differentiation is to further develop one's ability to be the person one wants to be, regardless of efforts and/or reactions of others that might be obstacles to the achievement of self-determined goals. The higher one's level of self-determination, the more one is available to others, because one is at less risk of losing self-direction in anxious relationships.

To be an agent of peace requires the ability to relate to both sides of a conflict without reacting to either side. Calm relating to both sides allows the parties in conflict to think, reflect, and define themselves more clearly. This focus on self-definition allows for tolerance and understanding.

ALL PROBLEMS REFLECT ANXIETY

Differentiation of self and anxiety go together, in that the lower an individual's level of differentiation, the less he or she will be able to adapt to stress—especially stress from chronic anxiety. Chronic anxiety exists in response to imagined stress with no end in sight; it is fed by fear of what might be. Chronic anxiety can be thought of as a kind of stage fright. Acute anxiety, on the other hand, has to do with what is. It is fair to say that every problem within the human being, the family, and the community or society requires anxiety. Problems are symptoms of anxiety; they feed off anxiety. Without anxiety, problems shrivel up and disappear.

The reduction of anxiety is an important component of most, if not all, forms of psychotherapy. Within the context of Bowen Family Systems Theory, the reduction of anxiety is a consequence of one person within an emotional unit working to increase his or her basic level of differentiation. In other words, when any one member of an emotional

Within the context of Bowen Family Systems Theory, the reduction of anxiety is a consequence of one person within an emotional unit working to increase his or her basic level of differentiation

unit takes on the task of increasing his or her immunity to chronic anxiety while continuing to relate to the rest of the unit in a calm, friendly, respectful manner, both the individual and the community experience a reduction of chronic anxiety and a decrease in the severity of symptomatic behavior.

This is not to say, however, that all methods of reducing anxiety automatically improve the degree to which an individual and the individual's family and community are immune to anxiety. Chronic anxiety is contagious and is transmitted through the relationship system. If this emotional process of transmission is ignored, then one member may be calmer, but the anxiety will simply focus elsewhere, infecting a previously symptom-free person. Another way to explain this is to recognize that within an anxious family or community, one individual may absorb a great deal of anxiety by developing symptomatic behavior that becomes the focus of the entire community. If the focused-on person adopts an effective stress-management technique (e.g., biofeedback or yoga) that makes his or her symptoms subside, the anxiety within the family or community will shift to a new arena in which the group's anxiety is absorbed by a new symptom. Anxiously focusing on the new symptom, the group members feed it with their anxiety, thus sustaining it.

During his research Bowen recognized that all humans are pieces or elements in a structure of interlocking relationships. He was able to see the process of interconnectedness and describe it.

These descriptions became the basis for prescriptions of a way to manage self more calmly without transferring anxiety. Stated differently, understanding the emotional processes that govern how communities engage in transferring anxiety allows people to achieve improved overall functioning rather than become unwillingly trapped in a series of equally anxious shifts in functioning, in which the level of anxiety remains unchanged but the focus of the anxiety changes.

Anxiety drives individuals to behave automatically in instinctive ways. An anxious brain sees with tunnel vision. Situations may change, relationships may change, but an individual's response to anxiety does not. This tunnel vision produces patterned responses in which each person in the relationship system reacts automatically to the others. As one's behavior becomes more intense, others react more intensely, but the pattern is not changed—only more intensely pursued. It is possible to see such patterns and recognize how one is caught up in them. This allows a person to direct his or her energies to freeing himself or herself from the automatic cycle of patterned behavior.

RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

Five relationship patterns have been described by Bowen: conflict, distancing, cutoff, reciprocal overfunctioning or underfunctioning, and triangling. These patterns develop as a consequence of the tension generated by attempts to balance the forces of togetherness and individuality.

Conflict, like all other patterns in relationships, is at its roots a way of managing anxiety. In the conflictual pattern, it takes the form of criticism, defensiveness, blame, accusation, and overfocus on others rather than self. It can escalate into abuse and violence. Conflict usually resolves itself after a period of avoidance, which is followed by reconciliation and a honeymoon period. This results in renewed conflict as the cycle repeats itself. The cycle is potentially endless.

The way out of the conflict cycle is first to understand that criticism and blame of others is the basis of the conflictual cycle and then to reverse it by focusing on oneself. Just watching the process and monitoring self, with the desire to avoid being critical of others and placing blame on them, is calming. If one can replace criticism with curiosity, much good can happen. Watching the process and monitoring one's involvement in it often teaches one what to do to be more productive. The goal of decreasing one's reactivity to the emotional intensity

of another often involves some kind of distancing from the intensity. However, this does nothing to improve one's immunity to another's emotional intensity.

Distancing is observable in all relationships, to some degree. Bowen found it to be the most universal of the five patterns. It is so common that it is justified in our culture by being viewed as giving a person his or her "space." The distancing pattern can take many forms. In the extreme, cutoff, divorce, suicide, and resignation are forms of distancing. Signs of distancing are periods of noncommunication triggered by anxiety, workaholism, substance abuse, overinvolvement in hobbies, lack of personal conversation, and an inability to relate to a member of one's family or community.

As with all relationship patterns, the way out is to focus on the role self plays in the process. To escape from the distancing pattern, one must not go to the other extreme of pursuit. The middle ground between distance and pursuit is calm, self-defining contact that may allow one to bring meaning to relationships by attempting to make oneself known to others while showing curiosity or wanting to know the thinking of others. The effort to reduce distancing may require one to begin slowly. Often it is most helpful to recognize tendencies of self to distance in many relationships and to begin to work on self in several relationships.

Cutoff, as mentioned above, is an extreme kind of distancing. Bowen observed that this pattern has such negative, long-lasting consequences that it deserves to be mentioned separately. One cannot be cut off from a significant relationship without having all other relationships affected negatively. Undoing old cutoffs may be the most valuable effort one can make to improve the overall quality of life. To undo a cutoff, one must take responsibility for self in relationship to the other and to work to bridge the cutoff regardless of the other's initial response.

Reciprocal overfunctioning or underfunctioning occurs when one person in a family or community surrenders or denies self because of anxiety rather than principle, thus submitting to the desire of others. Submissive members of a family or community become vulnerable to symptom development, whether physical, social, or emotional.

Overfunctioning can take several forms, including advice giving, doing for others what they can do for themselves, worrying about others, feeling responsible for others, "knowing" what's best for others, talking more than listening, and having goals

for others that they don't have for themselves. Overfunctioning individuals tend to experience periodic burnout.

Underfunctioning involves all or some of the following: asking advice instead of thinking for oneself, getting help when it is not needed, acting irresponsibly, listening more than talking, rarely achieving goals, aimlessness, illness, and addiction. It is important to remember that this pattern exists in various degrees and that both underfunctioners and overfunctioners are equal participants in the problem. Overfunctioning and underfunctioning are forms of irresponsibility. As always, the way out of this destructive pattern involves self-focus and self-knowledge. Success in reversing a pattern of behavior is dependent on one's ability to be different while remaining in calm contact with others.

Triangling is the most complex and intriguing pattern. It is the pattern that unites a community or binds it together. Triangles are a mechanism for transmitting anxiety throughout the community. When anxiety develops in a two-person relationship beyond a tolerable level, a third person becomes involved in the tension between the two. Triangling functions to bring a third person into focus without resolving the relationship issues between the pair, and thus functions to prevent the resolution of relationship issues.

Triangles can be observed throughout nature. Common forms of triangling within human families and communities include talking against another person to someone else, or thinking about a third person rather than dealing with the relationship between oneself and a second person. The number of ways that people triangle is extensive. Triangling can take the form of asking advice of, or creating issues against, a third person. Triangles can even involve fantasy. In response to tension, one might begin to imagine oneself in a new situation. Or one may feel dissatisfied in one relationship and begin to worry about a third (perhaps absent) friend, colleague, or relative.

Triangles involve everyone in the family or the community. They are the mechanism that ties all the members of a community together in a single emotional unit. If one does not understand that a family or community is linked together by interlocking triangles, efforts to enhance self in a way that benefits all will be undone by unanticipated obstacles and roadblocks. Triangles are everywhere; they reach out to envelop new people in problems.

Each person in a triangle participates fully in the process. There is no perpetrator and no victim, because triangles require the cooperation of all in-

volved. This means that anyone who is motivated can engage in constructive detriangling. Detriangling requires being different without sacrificing the relationship. It involves one person's achieving more balance between the forces of individuality and togetherness (differentiation of self).

How one gets caught up in the emotional patterns of relating is set in the early years of life. Each human being is involved in a triangle with his or her mother and father, to some degree. In relating to our parents, each of us learns our instinctive response to anxiety. Triangles, cutoffs, distancing, reciprocal underfunctioning or overfunctioning, and conflict are patterned ways to seek comfort. Ultimately, they are self-defeating, but they are efforts to adapt to anxiety within our families, and they exist forever. Each human being is involved with the family of origin throughout his or her life. When people marry or enter a community, they bring their histories with them. The script for new relationships is written in the past, which is alive and active.

COMMUNITY CAN PROFIT

Religious communities struggle with togetherness and individuality as they work to create an environment conducive to the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development of all. Spiritual development cannot take place in isolation. Bowen has developed a theory and a consultation model of therapy that provide ways to enhance individuality while promoting community. For members of religious communities, Bowen's theory can point the way toward increased self-development while contributing to the entire community's overall level of functioning.

One cannot completely achieve differentiation (balance between togetherness and individuality) in a lifetime, but one can move ever closer toward the goal. To become more differentiated, one must become more of a self, with more knowledge of self and more capacity to maintain self in relationships. Efforts to learn systems thinking and to act on this

knowledge open one up to a greater capacity for God and community.

This article does not represent an exhaustive explanation of the concepts of Bowen Family Systems Theory. Decades of evidence suggest that it takes a minimum of six years of study to gain an independent working knowledge of the theory. It is not the purpose of this article to teach Bowen's theory. Rather, the goal is to introduce the reader to a body of knowledge that has the potential to make significant contributions to the quality of community life. This attempt is made with the understanding that Bowen's ideas represent a new way of thinking and that humans do not quickly grasp new ways of thinking. Undoubtedly, this fact has served us well over time. Fortunately, one does not have to wait for mastery of new ideas to benefit from them. The first efforts to think from a new perspective are calming and rewarding. Thinking may be our greatest passion. Our doing it well must thrill God.

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Loss, Grief, and Growth in Life's Later Years

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Much of the literature dealing with the later years of life seems to be devoted to losses, deficits, and diminishments. Indeed, many facets of aging are more intimately linked to losses of all types than to what might be termed attachments, or gains. While the interplay between attachment and loss is active throughout our lives, as we enter the later years of life, loss and the grief it engenders tend to become more complex, more intense, and more chronic. In earlier stages of our development, love and attachment were the dominant modes of our being, whereas loss and grief were encountered in a sporadic, even random, manner. For the older person, however, loss and grief seem to become the daily bread of life. Losses tend to occur far more rapidly than they did at earlier stages of life: health deteriorates, social and work roles are relinquished, peers and family members die. To maintain psychological health during the later years, one must learn to grieve quickly and well. Only by accepting and engaging the realities of life—including loss—can we fully enter into the later stages of growth and development.

The finality of the losses of the later years points clearly to the need to develop good grieving mechanisms. At earlier stages of life, although losses were encountered, few of them had the same quality of permanence that characterizes the losses one meets

in the later years of life. While all losses are distinctly unpleasant, at earlier stages of life there is at least the possibility of regrouping and starting over. Loss of a job or denial of a promotion, for example, might permit us to reassess our career options and make major changes. This is not so easily accomplished at a later stage of life; age discrimination laws notwithstanding, many employers are unwilling to hire someone who has only five or ten years of active employment remaining.

FINALITY OF LOSS THREATENING

Death is, of course, one of the most feared of the losses that occur late in life. The destruction of the connections by which we are woven into the fabric of the human community leaves us feeling that we have been set adrift, left without moorings in the larger society. Separation and death can be more than an older person is able to absorb, for late in life it is far more difficult to establish new emotional ties that provide strength and nourishment. Death of a spouse, in particular, is a major source of stress. Severing so intimate a bond is extremely painful at any point in life, but especially so in the later years, when there is less hope of establishing another relationship of that nature.

The finality of the losses incurred at this period obliges us to grieve deeply. The permanent removal of a connection to a person, place, work role, or thing that has been valued evokes pain at the very core of our being. To acknowledge that something or someone is irrevocably lost to us is both threatening and frightening. Many of us fail to acknowledge this finality, as it points all too clearly to our powerlessness, our finiteness, and our own mortality. Because we find it uncomfortable to deal with endings, we frequently fail to do the necessary grief work that losses, especially significant losses, require. The failure to acknowledge the finality of loss often leaves us mired in depression and anger rather than permitting a resolution that would lead to an acceptance of limits and free us for renewed growth.

Loss in later life also has a more subtle and pervasive quality than that found in earlier stages of life. Many of the losses encountered in this period of life are "process losses." They are the first intimations of mortality: the arthritic twinge, the diminished eyesight and hearing, the excess weight and loss of muscle tone. While it is possible to cope with these physical changes, it is also necessary to grieve the loss of the smooth, virtually unnoticeable body functioning that was characteristic of earlier periods of life. No longer can we assume the body will "be there" on demand; instead, it is necessary to devote more time and effort to maintaining good health and physical functioning.

GRIEF OFTEN NEGLECTED

Because losses in health and physical functioning are frequently incremental, they often fail to receive the attention and recognition they deserve. As a result, the necessary grief work often remains undone, and the load of unresolved grief mounts higher. What is seen, in many cases, is a certain irritability with ourselves and a lack of acceptance of our aging physical bodies. The desire to restore the body to a level of functioning that is impossible to attain may lead to a negative body image and resultant loss of self-esteem. In certain cases, the failure to grieve in this area of life can lead to engagement in extramarital affairs in order to prove that we are still physically attractive. The advertising world is well aware of these unacknowledged losses and exploits them to the full. How many products offer to "restore" our youthful figure, muscle tone, complexion, or potency? The Anti-Aging Store, found in a major international airport, seems to sum up the societal attitude that inhibits our ability to develop a positive body image in our later years. To come to an ac-

ceptance of our body image as an older man or woman requires an acknowledgment that youth, with its beauty, strength, and vitality, is gone and will not return.

The fact that today's loss builds on yesterday's losses during the later years of life adds another dimension to the complexity of the task of grieving well. We grieve not merely the current loss but also the earlier losses, whose memories are stirred to life again within the course of present grief. As we make our way through life, many losses are only partially resolved, while others may have been largely ignored. As a result, new losses and their concomitant grief have the potential to tap into a wellspring of feeling that lies beneath our surface calm.

Rather than face this pain, which has the potential to overwhelm carefully constructed defenses, many people resort to denial of the impact of loss and avoid those events, such as wakes and funerals, that might disturb their fragile equilibrium. This provides, at best, only a short-term solution to the problem of grieving. Frequently, grief that is not vented adequately through the channels ritualized by society is expressed in ways that may be unrecognized both by the grieving person and by those around him or her. Grief that is disguised as aloofness or irascibility is not very likely to engender human compassion for the grieving person. Thus, the person receives neither the emotional release that accompanies adequate grieving nor the social support that is available to those who are perceived to be bereaved.

In addition to grieving the loss of others who have played significant roles in our lives, we must also prepare for the final and most feared loss of all: the loss of ourselves. It is especially this loss of the self that underlies our reluctance to deal directly with loss and grief in other areas of our lives. To acknowledge limits and finiteness in other situations and relationships is to open the door to our own mortality. As poet John Donne observed, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." The thought of our final dissolution, at least in terms of life as we know it to be on earth, engenders a great deal of fear and apprehension. These feelings seem to be increased by the fact that in our urban society we seem to have lost a sense of the natural cycle of life and death. Unlike Saint Francis of Assisi, we do not recognize Sister Death as an integral player on the stage of life. Our medical and technological gains, such as life-support systems, have engendered a view of death as The Enemy, who must be defeated at all costs. Learning to grieve properly, then, includes grieving for the final loss of the self and coming to accept our own death.

Grief is an active process that requires of us the courage to acknowledge the degree to which a person or thing was cherished, to affirm what was precious in our lives, and to let go

DEFENSES AGAINST GRIEF

Grief is a painful emotion felt when we lose someone (or something) to whom (or to which) we have become attached. It comprises feelings of sadness, anger, regret, guilt, and nostalgia. The mix of feelings varies with the person experiencing the loss and with the nature of the attachment to that which is lost. Thus, grief is subjectively experienced and expressed in an individual and unique manner. Grief, however, is not just a negative feeling state. It is an active process that requires of us the courage to acknowledge the degree to which a person or thing was cherished, to affirm what was precious in our lives, and to let go.

Because the feelings associated with grief can be so painful, many people devise ways of avoiding them. These avoidance mechanisms, or defenses, may serve a useful function at the time of the initial loss. Denial, for example (expressed in the statement "I don't believe it"), and the emotional numbness so often experienced when one learns of a major loss, are defenses that "buy time" by allowing us to assimilate the loss in manageable increments. Slowly, the reality of the loss is admitted intellectually; following that, the emotional impact is experienced; and, over time, new behaviors are put in place to accommodate the new situation. Rather than being overwhelmed, the person who makes judicious use of psychological defenses is able to cope with and assimilate the loss. Because it is simply not

possible to make an instantaneous adjustment to significant losses, in most cultures there is a sanctioned period of mourning, during which persons who have suffered a major loss are permitted to work through their feelings and to arrive eventually at a point of acceptance of, and accommodation to, the changed reality in which they find themselves.

The prolonged use of psychological defenses that allow us to avoid grief work can lead to serious problems, however. Excessive reliance on defense mechanisms that demand a distortion of reality is extremely costly.

Denial. The defense mechanism of denial demands an increasing distortion of external reality to maintain the fiction that nothing happened, while tremendous psychic energy is spent, on the affective level, in maintaining a major distortion of emotional reality ("I don't feel pain, anger, guilt"). Maintaining faulty perception as if it were true leads, over time, to a weakened ability to distinguish other relationships and situations accurately. Denial of painful emotion, too, tends to become more pervasive and leads to emotional dulling, as it affects our ability to identify, distinguish, and experience all feelings. The net result may be the avoidance of pain, but the purchase price is the failure to experience love or joy.

Rationalization. Another common defense mechanism is rationalization, which also requires a distortion of reality, although to a lesser degree than denial. Through the use of rationalization we attempt to offer an explanation that will minimize the importance of the losses we have experienced and the pain that accompanies them. "Mother was suffering so much, it's a blessing that she's gone" is a common example of rationalization. This is not to say that, objectively speaking, it might not well be best that Mother has been relieved of intractable pain. But to focus on the relief from pain without looking at one's own sense of loss or one's anger at being "abandoned" by Mother leaves the grief work undone. While seeing the brighter side to a loss can be helpful, to look exclusively at the positive side encourages the adoption of a "Pollyanna" attitude. Deep healing cannot be achieved unless we look steadfastly and honestly at our pain. We must make the journey through the pain and grapple with it, rather than sidestep and avoid it, in order to come to a genuine resolution of grief.

Idealization. Another reality-distorting mechanism that interferes with the process of grieving is idealization. Only the positive aspects of the lost object

(person, job, home, youth) are recalled, and negative aspects are overlooked. Current reality cannot shine as brightly as the memory of the lost object and, as a result, the grieving person remains stuck in a nostalgic longing for that which can no longer be. Whether we idealize our youth or our spouse, not to acknowledge the negative aspects keeps us from truly appreciating the reality of the lost object. Idealization of the lost object also provides a convenient excuse for not moving forward and living our lives to the full. If we remain attached to an idealized time in the past, we need not invest in the present or future. If we idealize a former job, we have little incentive to seek or enjoy new employment or to invest emotional energy in a new job or new coworkers. The more unrealistic our view of that which was lost, and the more our psychic energy is directed to the past, the more difficult it becomes to invest in, and to obtain satisfaction in, the present.

OTHER AVOIDANCE TACTICS

While some persons rely heavily on defense mechanisms that distort reality, others adopt more active means to avoid dealing with the grieving process. Rather than face pain directly, some persons will lose themselves in a variety of activities. Victorian romances, for example, are replete with heroines who recuperate from lost relationships and broken hearts by doing the "grand tour." Other people throw themselves into their work in the hope that the demands of the job will anesthetize their feelings. Some avoid pain through the use of escapist literature, movies, or television; others immerse themselves in sports or hobbies that demand time and concentration. Compulsive attention to detail is useful to some people in warding off pain and anxiety, while others rush through a variety of experiences in an effort to leave themselves and their grief behind. Still others abuse drugs and alcohol in order to escape from their feelings, while physical illness may absorb some persons' attention to the exclusion of genuine grieving.

DEPRESSION MAY IMPEDE

Depression, one of the components of the grieving process, can become a sticking point for persons who are unable to grieve well. Although the person may appear to be doing grief work, in fact the processing of grief has been halted, and a mood disorder with potentially serious consequences has taken center stage. Excessive, unremitting depression is often a component of pathological grief.

Feelings of guilt, lack of self-worth, and loss of self-esteem seem to block the person's efforts to move forward to complete the grieving process. Often, the person's energies are focused so intently on the past that little energy can be mobilized for genuine enjoyment of life in the present. Depression at this level can then serve as an excuse for not living a full and rewarding life. In severe cases, the level of depression is such that suicide is attempted. Professional psychological assistance is necessary when one suspects that depression serves to block true grieving.

ANGER CREATES LINK

Unlike depressed persons, who seem to draw their grief into themselves, some people seem unable to move beyond the anger component of grief. Although it might not appear so on the surface, maintenance of anger is actually a way in which one refuses to face the finality of the loss. By remaining angry, one is able to keep alive the illusion that eventually that which is lost will be restored. To renounce the anger, to let go of it, is to admit defeat.

Anger and aggressive behavior also enable people to avoid facing their vulnerability. They function as a "No Trespassing" sign when dealing with others who might touch an open wound. Excessive anger allows one to deny pain and remain isolated from others, rather than appeal to the sympathies of others and seek support in a time of bereavement. While this may allow one to escape psychic pain, it does not permit one to grieve and achieve a positive resolution following a significant loss.

HEALING REQUIRES FACING GRIEF

Given the painfulness of the feelings that comprise grief, it is understandable that we make an effort to defend ourselves against them and avoid them as much as possible. Nevertheless, for healing to occur, grief must be processed. Much as in a dance, there must be periods when the pain is embraced, followed by periods of gentle distancing. The face of grief is a changing one, and our healing depends on our ability to keep pace with the various aspects of grief that present themselves to us over time. A major temptation during this process is to retreat to a "place of safety" by excessive reliance on one or more of the defense mechanisms noted above. This serves only to encase our grief, however, immobilizing both it and ourselves. Although we may have isolated our grief, we have not eliminated it. Since forward movement is stymied by our unwillingness to meet and own our grief,

our further growth in the tasks specific to the later stages of life is severely impaired, if not entirely blocked.

The process of grieving is not an act of willpower, however. It is a bringing to closure the feelings associated with a particular loss and is accomplished by allowing these feelings to work their way through our minds and hearts. It is an act of integration—an act of acknowledging that the significant persons, places, and things in our past will always have a defining and determining influence on our character, while gently turning our attention to those elements in the present that are also sources of meaning in our lives. It is a weaving of the threads of our history, the dark and the bright, not into a static portrait but into an ongoing, dynamic work of art whose being is becoming every day.

HEALTHY APPROACHES TO LOSS

What might be done to encourage “good grieving”? In the first place, intellectual and emotional honesty is required. This means being willing to give up an excessive reliance on denial and repression. It means that on the cognitive level, the fact of a loss is admitted, while on the emotional level, the feelings that accompany the loss are allowed to emerge and be felt. Rather than wait for a major loss that is powerful enough to dislodge our defenses, we can teach ourselves to lower those defenses by choosing to focus on one aspect of our lives that requires grieving now.

By way of example, select for yourself one instance of loss in your life that you think you have not as yet fully grieved. Perhaps it is a promotion you were denied or a friendship that deteriorated over time. Look at the loss from a variety of angles. Examine the situation: What occurred at work or within your former friend? What were your own responses in the situation? Seek to understand the various factors that contributed to the loss of the promotion or the friendship. Recall the positive elements of the job or the friendship and acknowledge the negative elements as well. Make sure that you neither belittle nor idealize the lost job or relationship. Look at your own behavior and ask yourself what you can learn from the experience. Practice letting go through the use of imagery. Make use of your imagination to picture your life without this particular job or friend. Allow yourself to sense how much this loss hurt you, and permit yourself to determine what new opportunities are still ahead. Do not attempt to force your feelings or imagination to fit some preconceived idea of the way things should be. Do not demand that your grief be resolved in

one easy session. Allow yourself to absorb what you can at any one time, and return to reexamine the situation at a later point. If you wish, keep a journal in which to record your thoughts and feelings. Observe the patterns of behavior you demonstrate in your current work situation or current friendships. Use your past experience to guide you toward positive change in the present.

As you go through the grieving exercise outlined above, you will gain confidence in your ability to accept and master the losses that have occurred at various times in your life. You will come to recognize that you have the strength to work through your losses. You will no longer need to rely exclusively on denial or repression to cope with painful aspects of your life. As you begin to have more facility in dealing with your feelings, you will discover within yourself a healthy pride and self-affirmation. Rather than considering yourself weak or defective for revealing the emotional side of yourself, you will become comfortable in taking the risks needed to allow genuine expression of the feelings associated with your life losses.

HELPING THE BEREAVED

When the loss experienced is the death of a loved one, it may be helpful to make use of the rituals provided by society to facilitate grieving. There is a tendency on the part of society, however, to attempt to “sanitize” death and to deny the full extent of the loss, and that works against good grieving. Funeral chapels that advertise their “rooms of repose” are one example of societal collusion with the individual’s need to deny death and loss. Admonitions not to cry are also ways in which well-intentioned family members and friends attempt to circumvent the processing of grief. Prayers that focus exclusively on themes of resurrection or an afterlife may also impede the grief process. It is important that those ministering to the bereaved allow them to focus on their loss, not attempt to disguise it under promises of heaven or some other form of an afterlife. Nevertheless, when used well, rituals such as a wake, a prayer service, a funeral, or a memorial service can be helpful in allowing a bereaved person to begin the process of accepting the finality of his or her loss. Use of the psalms, especially those reflecting the theme of exile, might be helpful, for the psalmists did not hesitate to express a full range of emotion. They were sure in their conviction that God was strong enough to accept their anger, pain, and tears; gentle and caring enough to be present to them in their time of loss and grief; powerful enough to be a source of hope and renewal.

POWER OF HUMAN PRESENCE

The attentive presence of family and friends can be of immense help in processing grief and can do much to alleviate the sense of isolation that accompanies a major loss. Many churches recognize the power of human presence in the grief process and have organized various forms of bereavement ministry to support church members in times of loss. In fact, it is especially in this area of ministry that elderly people have a significant role to play, as they have encountered loss and grief in a variety of ways throughout life. In the presence of friends or other persons who minister to the grieving, the bereaved person can be encouraged to express, verbally or nonverbally, the pain of the loss, the feelings of sorrow, and the recognition of the finality of the loss. Widow-to-widow groups have been formed to assist with bereavement by providing peer counseling and emotional support during the first months following the death of a spouse. Grief groups, composed of persons who have suffered significant losses of any type, also offer counseling and support. As new members join the group, those members who have worked their way further through the grief process are able to provide guidance and encouragement. The very act of helping another serves to facilitate the necessary letting go by focusing energy and emotional engagement in the present.

GRIEF SOMETIMES PATHOLOGICAL

While normal grieving tends to run a fairly predictable course, there are times when some individuals fail to move forward and resolve their grief. Pathological bereavement, often marked by anger and hopelessness, calls for therapeutic intervention. In these instances it may be necessary for the therapist to assist the bereaved to resolve longstanding conflicts that have undermined or blocked the grieving process. Once these major conflicts have been addressed, the grieving process continues unimpeded. To facilitate the removal of blocks to the

grieving process, the therapist may make use of a variety of techniques, including guided imagery or having the person write a letter to the deceased. Occasionally, psychotropic medication may be helpful in stabilizing a person locked into pathological bereavement while the therapist works to remove the impediments that block the resolution of the grief process and the person's reintegration into the world of the present.

GROWING INTO OLD AGE

During the final stage of life we have an opportunity to more fully appreciate the beatitude "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Despite the difficulties encountered in the process of grieving, we can count on the comfort or strength of spirit that Jesus promised. But recognizing, honoring, and mourning our losses constitute only one part of entering fully into the later stages of growth and development. There is also a need to accomplish the developmental tasks that are appropriate to this phase of life. We must grow into old age, not merely fall unwittingly into it.

RECOMMENDED READING

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A Code of Ethics for Spiritual Directors

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In a recent HUMAN DEVELOPMENT article (Fall 1993) Janicemarie Vinicky posed the question, Is spiritual direction ready for a code of ethics? I find her solidly affirmative response encouraging, as a spiritual director who has served as a teacher and supervisor in a training/certification program, and as one who has worked with directees who have experienced less-than-professional direction or even inappropriate behavior from a director.

In this article I would like to affirm the practical wisdom imparted by Vinicky and to expand upon several points. My hope is that the discussion surrounding the development and implementation of such a code will continue among spiritual directors, teachers, and supervisors in certification programs, and among other pastoral ministers as well.

When noting that there are a variety of reasons that prompt people to seek direction, Vinicky points directly to the heart of the matter: "Regardless of the reason anyone seeks spiritual direction, it is essential that the spiritual director be skilled and knowledgeable in the art and its practice." With the increasing professionalization of and requests for spiritual direction, programs and processes must be developed and implemented to ensure that the skills and knowledge necessary for quality direction are in fact possessed and used by those who are directors.

SPECIAL PREPARATION NEEDED

As Vinicky observes, recent years have seen the emergence of programs specifically designed for the training—and in some instances the certification—of spiritual directors. Processes and practices for maintaining the quality of spiritual direction will have to be built into any code of ethics that is developed. Thus, it is important for any training program to include an ethics component—not simply a random class on moral theology but a deliberate examination, study, and discussion of the dynamics and ethics of the director-directee relationship.

The special preparation directors receive is of particular importance. Vinicky cites the areas of preparation specified by author Kevin Culligan and the prerequisites identified by the Cleveland (Ohio) diocesan program. I second those areas and prerequisites and propose an addition and a caution to them.

The addition is that directors should have some familiarity with a major school of spirituality within the Catholic tradition (e.g., Carmelite, Ignatian). Such familiarity provides directors with some fluency in the language and perspective of the mystical tradition of the church. Many experiences that directees relate to directors—for example, dryness or discouragement in prayer, desire to deepen faith

and follow Jesus more intensely—are addressed eloquently within that tradition. Though the approach with each directee must be personal and unique, given the individual experiences and expectations involved, there is wisdom in knowing the common ground within the spiritual life, which the mystics have identified over the centuries.

The caution concerns the role of psychology, psychotherapy, and related disciplines within the direction relationship. Certainly, they must have a role, and directors must have some fluency with them, as directees cannot be limited to bringing only “spiritual” matters to direction. Personal and relational realities are part of the spiritual life and will emerge naturally within spiritual direction. For that very reason, it is important that directors be very clear—for themselves and for directees—about the distinction between spiritual direction and psychological or pastoral counseling or psychotherapy. It is a matter of focus. Admittedly, everyday life and life in the spirit cannot be sharply separated and treated as two isolated entities. Such a separation fails to recognize the unifying work of the Lord’s incarnation. Nevertheless, once the development and maintenance of the basic human skills necessary for a functional everyday life become the principal and persistent focus of the dialogue, the relationship must be characterized as something other than spiritual direction.

AUTONOMY OF WORK

As spiritual direction continues to move toward professionalization, autonomy of work—though a delicate issue—will have to be discussed and evaluated in light of the competencies necessary to practice quality direction. Autonomy of work can have both positive and negative influences on the practice of spiritual direction.

The positive influence is that directors have freedom of choice regarding style. As Vinicky notes, “At present spiritual directors may choose any number of philosophies for direction, and they may choose to provide either individual or group direction or both. Some spiritual directors charge a nominal fee for their consulting services.” This freedom spares directors from looking as if they are products of the same assembly-line spirituality factory. It also gives directees a spectrum of directors to choose from. The wisdom in this is that a directee can find a director with a combination of personality and perspectives that truly supports his or her growth in the spiritual life.

The negative influence within autonomy of work is that directors can provide services completely un-

monitored. They can pass on spiritual or theological inaccuracies to directees, place unrealistic expectations on directees, and descend to inappropriate behaviors with directees. Even without going to such extremes, directors still acquire reputations, and directees can choose a director who is known to offer no real challenge for self-exploration and continued growth. Sometimes such choices are made by those who are expected or required to have a spiritual director because of their immediate environment (e.g., seminarians, those in formation programs for incorporation into a religious institute, those seeking certification in spiritual direction or some related ministry).

CONTENT AND CONDUCT

A code of ethics can serve to regulate the content and the conduct within the director-directee relationship. In emphasizing the timeliness of developing a code for spiritual directors, Vinicky observes,

It is possible, although not likely, that a person paying for spiritual guidance could find himself or herself in an interaction with a director that is a poor substitute for seriously needed psychological counseling. It is also possible, but not probable, that persons providing spiritual direction, although well-intentioned, could be providing some form of psychotherapy without having the appropriate training or education.

From my perspective, it is more than simply possible for such confusion of disciplines to take place within the context of spiritual direction. Currently, there is no core curriculum mutually agreed on and adopted by training and certification programs, although the issue has been discussed at meetings of the directors of such programs. Until there is a basic curriculum, there will continue to be an unevenness of preparation among spiritual directors. When that unevenness combines with a director’s desire to help and to serve the directee as much as possible, the relationship can easily move into a therapeutic mode. In addition, not all directors have developed a referral system, which should include psychologists, psychotherapists, and physicians.

I second Vinicky’s opinion that “the potential for unethical conduct in spiritual direction exists, and it may be greater than the potential for unethical conduct in psychological counseling.” Many directees confer a great deal of unarticulated power upon their directors, especially those who feel that for the first time they have encountered someone who listens intently to them and understands their life situation and their relationship with God. The

director can become mentor and model, seeming to have a "perfect" life. If the director does not operate by a code that has self-regulating features, it would be more than possible to misuse or even abuse that power and use a directee to fulfill personal needs, self-image, and expectations. This is rarely so blatant as to be immediately objectionable; rather, it is so subtle that neither the director nor the directee may be aware of what is happening initially.

CONTINUING THE DISCUSSION

In her "Proposed Code of Ethics," Ms. Vinicky provides a solid foundation upon which further discussion and refinement can take place. As a means of continuing the discussion on the development of a code, I would expand several of the components she identifies.

Vinicky writes that "the relationship between the director and the directee is a confidential one, except in situations in which the directee becomes a threat to himself/herself and/or others." The other exception I would note is in the context of religious or seminary formation. Otherwise it is possible for a candidate to withhold some information from the formation directors under the rubric of discussing it confidentially with a spiritual director. This could easily compromise the process and purpose of formation if it involves some issue affecting the capability or the willingness of the person to continue pursuit of a religious or priestly vocation. Within formative environments, spiritual direction must be at the service of the formation process. This is not to diminish the privileges within the direction relationship but to assure unity, consistency, and honesty within the experience of formation.

According to Vinicky, "the spiritual director should not impose his or her moral or religious values upon the directee." This is an exceptionally important component of a code of ethics; it is closely related to the power a director can have in the eyes of a directee. I would further specify this component of the code by adding that spiritual directors should not impose their theological opinions or interpretations of scripture. It is true that a directee may need some information concerning church doctrines or practices, but such information must be clearly distinguished from individual positions held by the director. This is especially true of discussions concerning biblical teachings and texts. If a direction relationship ever becomes a series of debates, then the focus on what God might be saying through the scriptures is completely lost.

Another of Vinicky's contentions is that "the spiritual director should be knowledgeable about coun-

seling and psychotherapy and should refer a directee who requires either counseling or therapy to a qualified practitioner of the appropriate service." There are many psychologists and psychotherapists who are also skilled as spiritual directors. Very often, their patients are not the same persons as their directees. I affirm this separation of services because of the significant differences in content. Thus, if a referral situation emerges in the case of a director who is also a counselor or therapist, there should be a determination of which relationship will continue. If direction, then the directee should move to someone else for counseling or therapy; if counseling or therapy, then the directee should move to someone else for spiritual direction. Admittedly, there will always be some overlapping in these disciplines, but it is unfair and confusing to the directee to make them synonymous.

"The spiritual director should continue his or her education in the practice of direction," Vinicky writes, "and should regularly seek peer review for self-assessment purposes." I believe this is the litmus test for determining if spiritual direction will effectively continue moving toward professional status. As Vinicky notes earlier in her article,

Professional ethics requires consulting professionals to articulate their duties and responsibilities to their clients and to make those duties and responsibilities known to the public. Our legal system requires professionals to self-regulate, thereby protecting the lay public from charlatans.

If directors are unwilling to seek continuing education and invite periodic review, then spiritual direction will remain outside the professional world, and the possibility of charlatans will stand firm. Education and review have important implications for the position of parish spiritual director, which is emerging more and more. Those seeking such a position should articulate their qualifications and the professional means they use to maintain those qualifications. Also, parish administrators should expect and request this basic information, and it should be accessible to potential directees.

Vinicky's proposed code of ethics stipulates that "the spiritual director should never knowingly deceive the directee." Within the general category of deception, though it may be more subtle, is the issue of promising results. For a director to promise a directee, implicitly or explicitly, that after a certain period of time in spiritual direction, he or she will definitely pray more or better, become a more loving person, have an increase of faith, or be more Christlike is simply unethical. While all of these results can flow from the experience of direction, the

director must always make clear to the directee the personal effort and discipline necessary for responding to the workings of grace if sustained growth in the spiritual life is to be realized.

Finally, Vinicky writes that "the spiritual director should never be complacent about his or her relationship with God or with the directee, and should continually reassess those relationships." This statement needs no expansion. I cite it here because it is a solid affirmation of the fundamental truth about the ministry of spiritual direction. Above all, direction is the Lord's work; both director and directee are actively involved in the work of grace. Continually reassessing relationships with God and directees refreshes that involvement and safeguards against the insidious compromises of complacency.

HOLY SPIRIT THE PRINCIPAL GUIDE

A code of ethics for spiritual directors is not a completely new concept. Many important figures within the history of spirituality have commented on the skills, gifts, and sensitivities necessary for effective direction, including Saints Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, and Therese of Lisieux. Karl Rahner, Thomas Merton, and the recent authors cited in Vinicky's article have also written on these issues.

In "The Living Flame of Love," Saint John of the Cross identifies some realities that can be hindrances—"blind guides," as he calls them—in the spiritual life. Among those realities, he notes that "many spiritual masters cause great harm to a number of souls." This is precisely why "it is very important that individuals, desiring to advance in recollection and perfection, take care into whose hands they entrust themselves."

Saint John surely did not believe that all spiritual directors were always a hindrance; if that had been the case, he would never have been willing to serve as director to so many people. He did believe, however, that the potential for hindering a person's progress was always there. If spiritual directors are not trained properly, and especially if they are not sensitive to the ways and works of the Lord within a directee, then they will be a hindrance. Their counsels probably will be ineffective and possibly may be counterproductive.

Already we can see some elements for a spiritual directors' code of ethics in the writings of Saint John of the Cross, who insists that "spiritual masters should give freedom to souls and encourage them in their desire to seek improvement." The

challenge, of course, is for directors to know—or at least strive to know—the best means of guiding a particular directee in freedom and with encouragement.

The high standards that must be expressed within a code of ethics are a means of quality control; even more, they are a reminder of the serious and sacred responsibility that spiritual directors take on. In "The Living Flame of Love," Saint John of the Cross identifies the core of that responsibility:

Directors should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls . . . but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. Thus the whole concern of directors should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one; if they do not recognize it, they should leave the soul alone and not bother it.

Janicemarie Vinicky's article has contributed to an important discussion among spiritual directors, supervisors, and directors of training and certification programs. My hope is that the discussion will continue among all those involved in and preparing for this ministry, within organizations such as the National Federation of Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Directors International, and in diocesan spiritual life offices. The discussion needs to continue. We have a solid foundation, already proposed, upon which to build.

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A Spirituality for Married Life

Patrick J. McDonald, M.S.W., and
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Marital spirituality can relate to diverse realities: the shared experience of a sunset, an intense exchange over issues, a long vigil during a spouse's struggle with serious illness, or a humorous interlude shared by two people living under the same roof. In contrast to individual spirituality, marital spirituality by its very nature implies sharing. A couple must decide what kind of spirituality is best for them, talk about it, and weigh its implications for their future. Ideally, these exercises should be done within a prayerful context. Like any developed spirituality, marital spirituality involves a long period of hard work.

This article is an exploration of marital spirituality from a limited perspective: that of entering into the uncertainty and darkness that comes from change.

MARITAL DEVELOPMENT

Contemporary views of marriage make few judgments about the right or wrong way to live a joint life. Theories center on interactive processes, defining marriage as dynamic in nature and subject to significant changes over a lifetime. Change and development are accepted as normal and healthy, taking into account the reality that change can generate anxiety for both parties in a marriage.

The growth of a marriage relationship takes place in diverse ways. Sometimes a marriage just seems to carry itself along peacefully, and intimacy is sought and willingly affirmed by both parties. Friendship is embraced, communication flows effortlessly, and the partners feel good about their shared life. At other times relating meaningfully is strained and difficult. Energy is spent on individual emphases, and there is a reluctance to be together.

On the basis of these observations, we predicate that there are two dynamic forces at work within any marriage. There is the strong emotional pull toward closeness and intimacy, which we term marital union. There is another strong pull within the individual as well, toward an experience of individuality and independence; we term this energy the pull toward differentiation. A more independent self is both the end result and the driving force in differentiation. The phrase *differentiation of the self* is often used to describe the occurrence of separating from one's spouse and moving toward a more independent life. Daniel Papero, author of *Bowen Family Systems Theory*, describes the complexity of that process in the following way: "Differentiation concerns the individual. It addresses how people differ from one another in terms of their sensitivity to one another and their varying abilities to preserve

a degree of autonomy in the face of pressures for togetherness.”

When viewed within this context, marriage is seen as a challenging and difficult task of seeking harmony between the forces of union and differentiation. When these two forces are balanced to the mutual satisfaction of the couple, there is an experience of enjoyment in the marriage. If one listens closely to the shared language of the couple, a vocabulary of harmony can be heard: “Our differences no longer divide us.” When there is conflict, one can hear the vocabulary of an entry into confusion and darkness: “I’m very disappointed in marriage,” or “I don’t feel what I used to feel. I’m not sure I love him anymore.” Paradoxically, the stronger the individual definition of the self in each partner, the more comfortable and lasting the intimacy. A person with no sense of his or her own autonomy and boundaries cannot allow another to be close.

We believe that any change in the attitudes and/or behavior of a spouse causes an imbalance in the relationship. Relationships do not tolerate an imbalance for long, so it is a common tendency for a couple to seek a new balance in the relationship as quickly as possible.

A JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS

Reflections on spirituality have always acknowledged that we all experience periods of doubt and uncertainty. These periods are sometimes described in metaphors (for example, as a journey through a desert). In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton writes:

Let us never forget that the ordinary way to contemplation lies through a desert without trees and without beauty and without water. The spirit enters a wilderness and travels blindly in directions that seem to lead away from vision, away from God, away from all fulfillment and joy. It may become almost impossible to believe that this road goes anywhere at all except to a desolation full of dry bones—the ruin of all our hopes and good intentions.

Merton’s language is strong; he leaves no doubt that desolation and emptiness are to be expected somewhere on the spiritual journey. His desert imagery implies emotional discomfort.

It is our position that the journey into darkness (or a walk across the desert) relates to normal developmental changes within a marriage. Sooner or later, for every couple, there will be a time of darkness when the tension between the energies of union and differentiation creates a time of doubt, uncertainty, and anger for both partners.

Developmental changes are inevitable for every couple except the most severely dysfunctional, so the related anxiety, confusion, anger, and conflict are part of any marital experience

STAGES IN MARITAL DEVELOPMENT

We will briefly explore some developmental processes in marriage and describe the changes related to these processes as an entry into darkness. We have divided these dynamics of change into seven stages. We want to caution the reader that marriage is a complicated and highly individualized state, so these stages represent only tentative suggestions about marital dynamics.

Stage 1: The Early Enmeshed Stage. At the beginning stage of marriage, couples are locked together very tightly. Vocabulary in these tightly bonded marriages reflects a lack of differentiation (“Our differences are only surface”). These couples do love each other, and much of this love is based on “feeling good.” At this stage they often enjoy a placid and undisturbed experience of togetherness in all matters, acknowledging no real differences in their persons.

At this stage the partners’ spirituality is often self-serving, based on the rewards of a love that is close and warm. They love God in a similar fashion, and their religious sentiment is devotional and filled with warm feelings of love.

Stage 2: Beginning Differentiation. This is the beginning of the entry into darkness, as the energy of differentiation prompts one person to become more independent and free. This shift is often announced

The richest rewards of a marriage come from reflection on the couple's passage through a period of darkness and emergence into the light

with a declaration that implies, "I am no longer excited about marriage, and I long for the single life." Confusion sets in for both partners, with neither one understanding what is happening to their union. The loss of closeness and the attendant conflicts are devastating. Pessimism often replaces prayer life. The partners feel abandoned by each other and by God.

Development of a spirituality at this stage, when few familiar and comforting signs of love are present, implies a painful reevaluation of the meaning of a maturing love.

Stage 3: Developing Differentiation. Marriage at this stage is a crucible of anxiety and purification. Couples are called by the demands of maturing love to let go of their adolescent fantasies. The darkness can deepen as partners begin to see more clearly "the real person" they married, rather than the old idealized image. Periods of darkness and light alternate quickly, since the experiences of friendship and closeness are fluid and transient. Nothing is stable for long.

Spirituality at this stage deepens around a sense of fidelity to the marriage itself. Couples are called to remain loyal to each other, even though they must search diligently for good feelings. God dwells in this darkness, and there is a clear call to be purified in love.

Stage 4: Deepening Differentiation. Darkness at this stage means learning to adjust to an emphasis

on equality in the marriage. Much conflict can be present as partners defend their positions about what they want for their lives. The task of growth relates to letting go of control and moving toward a more democratic style of marriage.

A deepening spirituality here relates to partners' patiently exploring their life with honesty, candidness, and openness. Friendship in a marriage at this stage can be a reality, but it is usually balanced with a great deal of space and an agreed-upon atmosphere of mutual respect.

Stage 5: Crystallized Differentiation. This stage brings some couples into the depths of the dark night, and their vocabulary becomes painfully candid and clarifying ("You are not going to define how I think and feel"). The partners address hard questions, often in isolation, about why they should remain in their marriage when there are few rewards and little togetherness. The darkness deepens as polarization increases. Efforts at discussion are likely to lead to fighting. At best, a peaceful coexistence is accepted.

Utter helplessness and total vulnerability make prayer (if the partners can pray) and spirituality more honest. For some, only a tearful plea for help from God holds the relationship together. Love is becoming purified during these dark moments. Purification moves a partner to become a faithful friend who seeks few rewards for being faithful. Staying power during empty times comes mysteriously from God.

Stage 6: Movement Toward Integrated Union. The darkness begins to lift, and a clarity about one's own value as a person begins to return to the partners in a marriage. New possibilities for friendship begin to evolve. A richness comes from the spouses' realization that they have lived through so much together. Because stronger selves have developed, a fresh agenda for intimacy takes shape. Each person speaks from a comfortable and reflective "I" position. A typical statement is, "I no longer expect her to make me happy." An awareness of the rewards of loyalty and fidelity starts to energize the relationship. The partners also become aware of the loyalty of God, who has sustained the marriage through hard days.

Stage 7: Enriched, Integrated Union. Friendship comes alive in many dimensions. God's presence becomes more light than darkness, and a spontaneity and deep peace sustain the marriage. Optimism about "making it together" strengthens the couple, allowing them to disagree and freely argue. They

successfully balance the demands of union and differentiation in a vital way. Their respective security, which flows from two differentiated selves, enables them to enter more deeply into the demands of love without fear of getting lost in the complexity of interaction. God's presence is a sustaining love and is not wedded to a specific form of expression.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS NOT UNIFORM

The stages of development only suggest some observable interpersonal benchmarks. The forces at work in these stages are so powerful that not every marriage survives them.

Developmental changes are inevitable for every couple except the most severely dysfunctional, so the anxiety, confusion, anger, and conflict related to these changes are part of any marital experience. Darkness differs for each couple in magnitude and depth. An insensitive oversight during the honeymoon can create despair, and so can the diagnosis of cancer in a spouse after twenty-five years of relatively carefree living. Both experiences are deeply felt but can hardly be equated as measures of darkness. Some couples seem to adapt to changes quite well and move blissfully through their marital history. Others are profoundly affected by every slight shift and easily move into the depths of darkness. God writes the story of each marital relationship differently but no less beautifully than any other.

Each stage of development has its own rewards and difficulties, but a deep and mature spirituality in

marriage implies a movement through these stages, which takes years. The richest rewards of a marriage come from reflection on the couple's passage through a period of darkness and emergence into the light. There is a sense of having journeyed through a great deal together, of having worked hard to make life take shape and of having been successful at it.

At any stage of development, the spirituality of marriage calls a couple to accountability to the relationship, and to a deep reevaluation of values—a source of tears, honest exchanges, and enriched prayer.



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A Pilot Project for Spiritual Direction

Anna Marie Kane, S.S.J., D.Phil.

Author, teacher, and spiritual director Tad Dunne describes spiritual direction as a privileged moment and ministry. He identifies it as a non-threatening, affirming, peaceful experience for persons sharing their faith stories and those who are reflectively and respectfully listening and responding to them. Unfortunately, however, the possibility of regular individual spiritual direction for many people is limited and often not even possible. It was in response to this need that the pilot project "Opportunities for Spiritual Direction" was initiated in the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1987. The history of this project is both unique and fascinating.

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

One of the major responsibilities of the local ordinary (bishop) of any diocese, past and present, is the spiritual formation and pastoral care of the people of God. In the Diocese of Worcester, as in other dioceses, this responsibility is divided in various ways among different people and agencies. In 1957 the lay apostolate department was established and charged with the "spiritual formation of laity and world responsibility." Several years later, in 1969, the senate for religious was established to address the spiritual and psychological needs of vowed

women and men religious. Within the first year of its existence the senate planned the formation of the Center for Religious, whose aim was "to be a consulting and referral assistant" to clergy and religious. In 1971 that center evolved into the Consulting Center for Clergy and Religious, and the focus shifted to addressing their "psychological problems . . . [and their] need to objectify [their] thinking." The consulting center reestablished itself in 1972 as the (now-defunct) House of Affirmation, which defined itself as a place where one could find "self-discovery through psychotheology." The component addressing spiritual needs and formation was reduced in this transformation.

In 1977 the Office of Continuing Education of Clergy and the Lay Apostolate merged to form the Office of Pastoral Services. In theory this merger should have covered the spiritual needs of laity, clergy, and religious under one umbrella, but in fact it did not. The newly formed office focused predominantly on the needs of clergy and, occasionally, of religious. In 1979 that office did publish a list of spiritual directors; peer support groups for those directors were formed, and those groups functioned well until they were disbanded in 1983.

Meanwhile, in 1981, the Senate for Religious, in conjunction with the associate vicar for religious,

published a survey to substantiate the verbalized request for frequent, regular spiritual direction opportunities in the diocese. Expectations ran high, and many anticipated that the result would be the establishment of a diocesan spiritual life center. That, however, did not happen. An updated listing of spiritual directors was the only product precipitated by the survey.

Since 1982 requests have continued to be made of the diocese to provide spiritual direction opportunities for laity as well as for clergy and religious. In January 1986 the vicar for religious convened a group of persons with expertise in spiritual direction to brainstorm on how the diocese might respond to such requests. With no budget, no building, and no track record, the options seemed bleak. A suggestion was made to experiment with a one-year pilot project: a program of "spiritual direction on wheels." Of the twenty-five directors present, eighteen agreed to commit a minimum of two hours a month to the project, which was named "Opportunities for Spiritual Direction."

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM

Six spiritual directors from the group formed a task force. Their objective was to determine the nuts and bolts of the project. They wrote a proposal and developed a projected time line. A graphic artist designed the literature to be disseminated. The task force corresponded with the bishop about the project and planned an "information night" to explain the program to the public. Plans were made for a future evaluation of the experiment, to be made by all involved in the project in June 1988. At that time a decision about the program's continuation or demise would be made.

Each person who expressed an interest in participating in the individualized sharing of his or her faith journey completed a written application, which involved indicating one's first, second, and third preferences for spiritual director, location of monthly meeting, and time of meeting. After the applications were processed, letters were sent to the participants informing them of their assignment to a spiritual director and reminding them of their responsibility to make the initial contact with the director. Each person met once a month with his or her director at a designated place for approximately one hour for an opportunity to "journey with a spiritual companion." A minimum donation of \$10.00 per month was requested (\$7.00 was the director's stipend; \$3.00 was returned to the central office to help defray postage and printing expenses). Facilities that hosted the monthly meetings did so free of charge.

The annual information night begins with prayer and reflective sharing; the pragmatic aspects of the program are offered after a short social break

One hundred people attended the information night in May 1987. Presentations offered that evening were (1) an overview of the history of spiritual direction in the Roman Catholic church; (2) a sharing, by two directors, of their personal experiences of being in direction; and (3) an overview of the history of the pilot project. Applications were distributed, and prospective participants were encouraged to "go home and sleep on it" before committing themselves to the ten-month experience. As of November 1988 there were seventy-five participants and twenty directors in the project. Seventeen different locations (not three, as originally anticipated) were being used as meeting sites. A supervision group had also been formed for some of the directors involved in the project.

SUPPORTIVE OPPORTUNITIES

The annual information night soon evolved into an annual evening of prayer for all participants, spiritual directors, and anyone interested in becoming involved in the program. Since 1988 the focus of these evenings has been on prayer and reflective sharing, with the pragmatic aspects of the program being offered after the time of prayer and a short social break. Even with limited advertising, an average of 125 people attended each of the first four evenings of prayer.

A second phase of development occurred when some of the participants requested opportunities for mini or extended directed retreats with the program's spiritual directors. Arrangements were made to offer a few limited opportunities of this type at a

local retreat house and at various other sites. To date, approximately twenty participants have taken advantage of these additional offerings. The retreat director is sometimes the person's spiritual director, sometimes another spiritual director from the program. No known major conflicts have resulted from these arrangements.

Beginning with the fifth year of the program, master of divinity students and formative spirituality students were doing their spiritual direction practica through this program. Supervision was available from qualified supervisors, who were also some of the program's spiritual directors. Those supervisors were recognized by both academic programs and worked closely with them during the following year.

EVALUATION OF PROGRESS

The original evaluation tool was a simple questionnaire in four parts, distributed to the spiritual directors in February 1988 (six months into the initial year of the pilot project). First, it inquired if the directors were available and willing to serve as spiritual directors for a second year. Of the thirteen respondents (72 percent of all directors), twelve said yes; the one negative response was due to a director's being transferred.

Because many of the spiritual directors involved in the pilot program had participated in local monthly peer supervision groups prior to 1984, the questionnaire asked if monthly gatherings of directors were desired. While all respondents said yes, three expressed reservations about their commitment to attending. Such gatherings were indeed held, but interest in them was short-lived.

The questionnaire also asked whether or not an annual retreat day should be scheduled for all involved in the pilot project. Most (eight) respondents said yes. Others (five) felt that any retreat opportunity should be separate from the pilot project.

The last question asked for suggestions regarding the pilot project's process. Nine respondents offered none. The other five directors had suggestions on locations of meetings, the process of approval of directors by the local ordinary, and the process of screening participants.

The second evaluation was made by the participants in April 1989. Of the eighty-two participants, twenty-five (31 percent) completed and returned the simple three-question questionnaire.

In the responses to the first question, "What did you find most helpful for you as a result of participating in regular spiritual direction?" several striking themes emerged: ability to focus more on God's action in one's life; more regularity in daily prayer;

**In response to an
evaluation
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if the program were
discontinued**

gratitude for a companion to share the journey; ability to set priorities more easily; growth in becoming a more positive, more loving person; and a sense of validation and affirmation of self.

The responses to the second question, "What did you find least helpful in the experience?" were fewer and concerned such issues as scheduling meetings, the fact that no sessions were held during the summer, and, in one case, a personality clash with a director.

The third question solicited "other comments." Nineteen people responded; six did not. The majority of the comments were continuations of responses to the first question and expressions of desire to continue in the program.

A more detailed evaluation questionnaire was distributed to 154 participants and spiritual directors in May 1991. Part one asked for basic demographic information, part two consisted of questions for directees only, and part three had questions addressed to spiritual directors only. The questionnaire was distributed to every person who had made formal application to the program during its first four years of existence and to anyone who had served as a spiritual director at any time in the program. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain whether or not individuals would continue in spiritual direction if the pilot project were terminated.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Of the 154 questionnaires distributed, sixty were completed and returned. Of these, forty-six returns

came from directees, thirteen from spiritual directors, and one from an individual who was both a director and a directee. Computer software was used to perform the statistical analysis of the data gathered.

Of the respondents, thirty were laypersons, three were clerics, and twenty-seven were vowed religious; women (78 percent) outnumbered men (22 percent). The youngest respondent was 27 years of age, and the oldest was 88; the median age range was 51–60. Twenty-one respondents had participated for all four years, twelve for three years, fourteen for two years, and thirteen for one year or less. Most (79 percent) of the directees had remained with the same spiritual director. Only 19 percent had two directors, and only one had three directors.

Attendance at the annual evenings of prayer was varied: 25 percent of the directees never attended, 54 percent attended once or twice, and 21 percent attended three or four times. As for the mini-retreats, 72 percent of the respondents had not participated.

Four percent of the directees stated that if the “Opportunities for Spiritual Direction” program were not continued in its present form, they would not continue in spiritual direction, but 96 percent said they would. The tremendous support for the program was obvious: 100 percent of the directee respondents said they would recommend the program to a friend.

The spiritual directors, who were truly the backbone of the program, were asked different questions. Of the thirteen directors who responded, 93 percent met with eight or fewer people for direction in the program, 7 percent met with more than eight but fewer than twelve, and none saw more than twelve.

For the directors, the most frequent meeting site was in the city of Worcester. Only 21 percent were under regular supervision for their spiritual direction ministry, but 85 percent were interested in forming a local peer supervision group.

If the “Opportunities for Spiritual Direction” program and coordination were to be terminated, 93 percent of the spiritual directors said they would continue meeting with their directees. For four years the suggested stipend for each meeting had been \$10.00. For 91 percent of the directors this was adequate. At the beginning of the fifth year the minimum donation per month was raised to \$15.00 to assist the few directors who travel significant distances to come to the program location. However, no directee is denied the opportunity to participate because of lack of funds.

Can a pilot project fly on its own? The answer seems to be a resounding yes

FURTHER QUESTIONNAIRE REPLIES

In response to the more open-ended questions, both directees and directors offered some helpful comments and criticisms. From directees, the comments on the “most positive or life-giving” aspects of the program included:

- “opportunity to look at my relationship with God on a regular basis”
- “getting to know Jesus and myself better”
- “someone who understands and can provide assistance in spiritual growth”
- “confirmation that God is speaking to me at times when I doubt the most”
- “opened doors for me that have been life-giving, with an orientation that has been particularly sensitive to my experience, state in life, and stages or passages in my life”
- “opportunity to be challenged”
- “my relationship with my husband has blossomed”
- “enhances my prayer and spiritual life”
- “guidance and support in facing truth”
- “[has brought] peace to my soul”
- “being able to discuss my personal feelings relating to my belief”
- “seeing God in a new light”
- “made me honest in my relationship with God”
- “a greater joy and peace and confidence in God”
- “awareness of scripture”

Comments on aspects of the program that were “liked least” by the directees included:

- "travel time"
- "not being able to continue in summer"
- "time constraints on both persons"
- "the May evenings [of prayer and information] seem to be repetitive"
- "overcautious spiritual director"
- "increase in suggested donation"
- "sometimes just chat"

Directors made the following suggestions to improve the program:

- "one common place [a spiritual life center] for this program and others related to it"
- "group needed for directors to offer more creativity and needs assessment"
- "one or two annual meetings for directors, with input of speakers as means of growth for directors"
- "expand awareness of program"
- "periodic newsletter to keep participants and directors in touch with program"

Can a pilot project fly on its own? On the basis of the results of the evaluation of this program, the answer seems to be a resounding yes. Indeed, if the original pilot project had not been initiated, one might wonder how—if at all—the past and present participants would have come to know and experience individual spiritual direction.

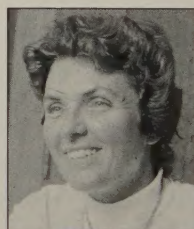
STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING A PROJECT

1. Gather names of potential spiritual directors.
2. Invite them to brainstorming session; determine their level of commitment and participation.
3. Establish a task force of six of the directors gathered.

4. Draw up a proposal, including tentative schedules and time line; designate meeting places; plan information night; decide on publicity and brochure; determine fee for participants.
5. Contact presenters for information night.
6. Publicize both information night and program to follow.
7. Host information night.
8. Distribute applications.
9. Collate responses; contact spiritual directors.
10. Initiate pilot project for a ten-month period.
11. Oversee program, maintaining necessary contact with participants via letters and telephone calls.
12. Evaluate program at end of experimental time and make recommendation for its retention or demise.

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BOOK REVIEW

Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership, by Gerald A. Arbuckle. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993. 226 pp. \$17.00.

You must bear in mind that if I speak strongly in various places . . . against the existing state of things [in the church], it is not wantonly, but to show I feel the difficulties which certain minds are distressed with.

—John Henry Newman

Thus begins the introduction to Father Gerald Arbuckle's newest contribution to our understanding of ourselves as a people of God. Writing from the perspective of a cultural anthropologist, Arbuckle presents definitions of a number of terms that will be used throughout the book: *refounding*, *contemporary restorationism*, *loyal dissent*, "authority" dissenters, and "pathfinding" dissenters.

Divided into two sections, the book first examines the role of dissent and its necessity in the process of refounding. The second section examines religious life as a case study, holding it up as a mirror for the church as a whole.

Each chapter begins with pithy focus statements on what the reader will find within. Each closes with an excellent page-long summary and an impressive bibliography. Based on his own anthropological training and his research, Arbuckle's insights are carefully presented through case studies, anthropological axioms, charts, and diagrams. With each of his successive books these have become clearer, simpler, and more straightforward.

The significant and powerful message of this book is that we the church run the risk of not claiming "our noble state in history" unless we are ready, able, and willing to acknowledge our horrific losses, unless we are committed to tolerating dissenters and dis-

sent toward necessary refounding, and unless restorationism is recognized for what it is and abandoned.

Arbuckle's premise is that dissenters—those who propose creative alternatives in times of chaos or uncertainty—are not only necessary but crucial if there is to be a future for the church. He reflects that the present state of the church is in chaos "because the felt order of pre-Vatican II has rapidly disintegrated":

As a theologian I am grateful for the Council's documents and regret that the Council was not called earlier, but as an anthropologist I believe the Council was naive about the cultural effects on Catholics of its decisions. . . . The resulting turmoil should have been expected and better catechesis prepared to explain the inevitable chaotic, yet potentially creative, consequences of the Council's decisions. . . . We are accustomed to seeing entire landscapes being destroyed and redeveloped over a short time. In our naive appreciation of the power of technology, we assume that the same destruction and redevelopment can take place within cultures. . . . Symbols, myths, and rituals are not replaced as quickly or easily as buildings or landscapes or mass-produced as neatly as automobiles.

Within this chaos, as in any culture, there develops a strong movement to restore the present to the glory of the past. Leadership has been unable or unwilling to name or own the chaos, and denial upon denial has exacerbated the dilemma. In this climate, groups or individuals emerge to "protect the church" in her identity and structures. Pressure to conform escalates, resulting in witch hunting, intolerance, and secrecy. Those who dissent are actively sought out, with the purpose of silencing or subduing them. Arbuckle notes that much of this goes well beyond the legitimate concern for theological orthodoxy.

Where he significantly contributes to the pressing issues of today is in framing answers to the critical questions: What is the style of leadership needed in

times of chaos and change? What type of leadership must the church adopt if she is to respond as an evangelizer to the pressing needs of today? How can "official leaders" be dissenters, and re-founding persons?

In chapter 4 Arbuckle examines these questions, as well as the spirituality needed for today's transformative leadership. He introduces ten statements of "need" that leaders with a transforming style of leadership understand and are able to address. Arbuckle forcefully contends that "hierarchically and pastorally, the church is over-managed," with leaders selected because they can maintain the status quo rather than because they are capable of offering creative innovation. "Innovators are dissenters," he writes; "they offer alternative ways of acting to a group." Innovators produce anxiety in the church—which, like any organization, has a built-in resistance to change. The summary of chapter 4 offers a cogent, comprehensive review of the qualities of a transforming style of leadership.

In the second section of the book, Arbuckle posits that life in religious communities mirrors the chaos that exists in the church. The nonreligious reader may be tempted to bypass these chapters, as they appear to be focused solely on religious congregations. It is important to remember that Arbuckle, as an anthropologist, has chosen to examine aspects of religious life in particular communities as case studies that mirror the movements in the larger church.

Throughout history, most religious congregations have been founded by loyal dissenters; however, Arbuckle writes, "I do not see any radically new form of religious life emerging overall that is outward-looking and confronting constructively the challenges of the contemporary secularizing world." He fears that religious congregations (which mirror the church) lack passion and re-founding fire: "As goes religious life, so goes the church."

In pointing out that "the new belong elsewhere" and that "all major re-foundings are fraught with schism and controversy," Arbuckle raises the question of whether most religious congregations today are more trapped in "escapist restorationism or benumbed by the chaos." He postulates that perhaps leadership today is so confused that it simply does

not know how to both lead and challenge congregations, communities, and groups. The examination of religious congregations should be helpful to all church leaders seeking to understand their own predicament, as well as to recognize the laboratory of change that is demonstrated, for better or for worse, by religious.

In the final chapters Arbuckle articulates concepts of community that are in accord with his beliefs regarding leadership.

Arbuckle heavily emphasizes the function of loss and grieving in authentic re-founding. Though seemingly a voice in the wilderness on this issue, he continues to state emphatically the cultural significance of mourning. Arbuckle believes that restorationism ideology is a symptom of our failure to grieve—"the refusal to let go of the irrelevant and to allow the apostolically new to emerge."

In closing, Arbuckle develops a model for collaborative leadership as an authentic style of re-founding. He includes an appendix of suggestions regarding consultants and facilitators. Arbuckle has definite beliefs about the value of utilizing an outside resource to enable groups to work through chaos. He emphasizes the importance of engaging quality people who are both skilled and clear on the "brief."

Arbuckle leaves the readers with some troublesome thoughts. The examples he provides are plentiful; his analyses are direct and clear. Yet as one reads the book, it is with a question as to whether or not we are capable of understanding ourselves while we are still firmly planted in our particular time and culture. If religious life is a mirror, a case study for the chaos in the church, what have we learned? If the church is in the midst of chaos, who are the loyal dissenters in her midst? If throughout history religious congregations have been founded by loyal dissenters, what is the future function of existent religious congregations? Where is the passion, energy, and commitment to move us through restorationism? Where are the pathfinders, the dreamers, the authority dissenters?

Accolades to Arbuckle for placing before us the definitions of reality we are often too paralyzed to name, much less claim.

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